

**The Dilemma of an Urhobo Baptist regarding Funeral Rites:
an Appraisal**

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PhD

2012

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By

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A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Liverpool

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Kingdom

August, 2012

Abstract

Michael P. Adogbo argued that religion and culture are intrinsically interwoven in the Urhobo mindset.¹ Addressing similar phenomenon generally among Africans, Musimbi K. A. Kanyoro stated that African Christian ‘often walks with one foot in African religion and culture and another in the church and Western culture.’² This phenomenon which Kanyoro argued that could be destructive if not well managed is the main issue examined more specifically in the context of culture and religion among Urhobo Baptists. The approach of the Delta State Baptist Conference (DSBC) to this reality among the Urhobo Baptists has created religious/cultural dichotomy in their funeral rites which this research addressed by examining two key questions: First, Could an Urhobo Baptist be faithful to the Baptist faith the way it is articulated in the DSBC policies,³ in view of Urhobo cultural identity during funeral ceremonies? Second, Could DSBC hold to its policy on burial rites and at the same time be relevant within the Urhobo society?

My experiences as a pastor among Urhobo Baptists enabled me to evaluate symbols and functions of Urhobo funeral rites in the context of some ethnographic, anthropological, and hermeneutical theories examined in this study. A major discovery is that Urhobo Baptists hold on to certain key aspects of Urohobo funeral tradition evaluated in this study in spite of their conversion to the Baptist faith. Similarly, to the Urhobo Baptists,

¹ Michael P. Adogbo, ‘Clairvoyance in Urhobo Traditional Religion,’ in *Selected Themes in the Study of Religions in Nigeria*, eds. S. G. A. Onibere and M. P. Adogbo, 139–151 (Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2010), 148–149. Adogbo is an Urhobo professor of African religions and sociology of religion at the Delta State University, Abraka in the heart of Urhobo Land.

² Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, ‘Engendered Communal Theology: African Women Contribution to Theology in the Twenty-first Century,’ in *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, ed. Kwek Pui-Ian, 19–35 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 19. Kanyoro is a feminist human rights advocate and African cultural anthropologist from Kenya.

³ Two DSBC leaders (Respondents 12 and 14) explained the dichotomy between the Urhobo traditional burial rites and the teachings of the Baptist denomination. The DSBC policies on burial view the rites of *evwe ehun* and slaughtering of other goats, shooting of guns to drive away the spirit of the dead and other evil spirits, and arming the dead with weapons to fight his/her killers as ‘pagan’ sacrifices, unchristian and ‘fetish.’

as analysed later in the thesis, the purpose of Urhobo funeral rites does not contradict the Baptist faith. These led to the major argument in this thesis that integration of certain vital aspects of Urhobo funeral rites into the Baptist funeral process is possible, valuable and advantageous for discouraging dual funeral faith practices among Urhobo Baptists.

Dedication

To the Triune God, the God and the judge of both the living and the dead⁴ and to the sweet memories of my parents, Pa Joseph Ejide and Mrs. Sarah Moradeyọ Ajagbe, my parents-in-laws, Pa Abraham Adegboyega and Mrs. Esther Wuraola Adeleke. This study is also dedicated to my two brothers (one dead, one living) who sacrificed a lot for my initial ministerial training, Late Mr. Lasisi (Azees) Ọladejọ Ajagbe (former chief Imam of Pọntela Ọlọde central mosque) and Evangelist/Prophet Isaac Okunlọla Ajagbe (of Christ Apostolic Church, Goshen Land, Ọlaotan Akinniyi Street, Logburo, Mowe, Ogun State, near Lagos).

⁴ Romans 14: 9, 'For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.' 2Timothy 4: 1, 'In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead...'

Acknowledgement

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!”⁵

I give glory to God for enabling the successful completion of this research. Amen. I also thank all human instruments he has used. The motivation developed through my contacts with Rev Dr. P. O. Davidson and Rev. Dr. T. M. Collins, the American Southern Baptist missionaries, also my lecturers at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS) Ogbomoso between 1992 and 1996, whose lives and ministries epitomised contextualization among the Yorùbá.

Ebenezer Baptist Church Sapele (EBCS) afforded me the opportunity to undertake this study by the grant of study leave. The Pastor’s project team, a group of volunteers within the church, encouraged my family throughout the course with their willing financial assistance. Others rendered regular financial assistance outside the team and I appreciate the constant prayer support of the entire membership of the church. Significant moral and financial support came from persons outside the church as well—from Honourable and Chief Mrs Monday Igbuya, Mrs. Okotie, Mrs. E. Otobo, Mrs. C. A. Oge, Mrs. O. E. Okeregbe and Chief O. M. Iloho (JP), the chairman of Isaka Hotel, Warri.

Integral to the smooth running of the research and data collection were the contributions of the participants in my ethnographic field work and Urhobo Scholars like Professors M. Y. Nabofa, S. U. Eriwwo and G. G. Darah. Others such as Dn. Dr. A. T. Onosode,

⁵ Revelation 5: 13.

Dn. Dr. P. L. Ishola, Dr. R. E. Isiorhovoja, Chief M. O. Origbo (OFR) assisted as readers and to ascertain the correctness of my presentation of Urhobo concepts. The multiple roles of our family friends like Chief Magistrate Daves Makunu, Mr. Endurance Ogbotor and Mr. Akpomiemi Akporo are beyond simple definition; therefore I say a big thank you.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisors, Rev. Prof. Daniel Jeyaraj and Rev. Dr. Peter McGrail for their meticulous academic supervisions engrained with spirited pastoral approach. They also facilitated, through the Andrew Walls Centre, the aid to offset part of my tuition. I am grateful also to other members of Faculty and Staff like Prof. Mary Mills, Dr. David Torovell and Mrs. Leahy Ursula, to my mentor, Rev. Dr. Jide Abimbola; my senior colleague, Rev. Dr. Joe Ewiwilem; and to contemporary colleagues Larry Ayuba, Samuel Tama and Philip Oyewale, who read different parts of the research materials and offered their invaluable suggestions.

I enjoyed my church denominational support through the financial assistance from the Sapele Baptist Association (SBA), Delta State Baptist Conference (DSBC) and the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC). I therefore thank the entire members of these different bodies and their respective officers at the time. The unflinching support of my family is unquantifiable. My spouse, Pastor Mrs Deborah Adebimpe Ajagbe, and children: Favour Toluwalase Oghenerovwo, Lucky Oluwatimileyin Oghenerukevwe and Blessing Oluwafunmiso Oghenerugba Ajagbe are wonderful beyond measure.

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List of Abbreviations

AAPS Anglican Adam Preaching Society

CCN Christian Council of Nigeria

CMS Church Missionary Society

CON/AC Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)

DSBC Delta State Baptist Conference

IMC International Missionary Council

LSBC Lagos State Baptist Conference

MMU Men's Missionary Union (in the Nigerian Baptist Convention and its branches from the national level to the local church assembly)

NBC Nigerian Baptist Convention (or simply 'The Convention')

OCF Order of Christian Funerals (The Roman Catholic Funeral Liturgy in use in England, Wales and Scotland)

RCC Roman Catholic Christianity

s.v under the word

TEF Theological Education Fund

UPU Urhobo Progress Union

USA United States of America

WCC World Council of Churches

CHAPTER ONE–INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This study developed out of my pastoral experiences among the Urhobo Baptists in Sapele and Idjerhe,⁶ in the Delta State of Nigeria, from 1996 to 2008. During that period, I observed the difficult situation that Urhobo Baptists faced due to the coexistence of two types of funeral rites, namely their traditional⁷ rites and the rites prescribed by the Delta State Baptist Conference (DSBC) of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC).

I conducted and attended many burials in the vicinity of Sapele and Idjerhe and witnessed occasions in which the family's duties to its ancestors conflicted with the norms of the DSBC/NBC and the local Baptist congregation.⁸ The DSBC is not comfortable with the rituals of ancestor veneration such as the maintenance of the *eshe/ephò* ('ancestral shrine'), the *aghwa rode* ('thick or evil forest'), the *agberen/erhuere* ('ritual burial' also known as 'second burial'), the *evwe ehun* ('waist

⁶ *Idjerhe* is also called Jesse, a corrupted version by the British colonial administrators who found it difficult to pronounce the word Idjerhe (See Samuel U. Eriwo, 'Idjerhe,' in *The Urhobo People*, ed. Onigu Otite, 56–62 (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) Limited, 1982), 57. Eriwo and Adogbeji Samuel (c. 1906–1982) gave similar explanation concerning Sapele formerly called *Urhiapele* (See Samuel U. Eriwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People* (Ekpoma: Department of Religious Studies & Philosophy, BENSU, 1991), 41; Adogbeji Salubi, 'The Origins of Sapele Township,' in *T. E. A. Salubi: Witness to British Colonial Rule In Urhoboland and Nigeria*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 263–278 (Lagos: Urhobo Historical Society, 2008), 263).

⁷ The research concerns the Urhobo Baptist families which continue to value their traditional funeral rites, not those who are already assimilated into the Nigerian Baptist funeral norms.

⁸ The conflict resulted in tensions and dilemmas which this research unveiled among the Urhobo. The type of these conflicts, tensions and dilemmas are aptly described, though from a pan-African perspective as 'The African Dilemma' which 'cannot be simply wished away.' (Kanyoro, 'Engendered Communal Theology,' 19). John S. Mbiti had earlier expressed similar thought about Africans (See John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1975, reprinted 1977, 1978), 9, 27; John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd Rev. and Enl. Ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1989), 1–3). Concerning the Urhobo in particular, Adogbo states that their socio-cultural, economic and political concerns likewise 'are intrinsically interwoven with religion' (Adogbo, 'Clairvoyance in Urhobo traditional religion,' 148–149).

goat,' parenthood sacrifice),⁹ the *esakpegodi/sakpregodi* ('fifth generation celebration')¹⁰ and performing burial ceremony in the night.

Besides, DSBC is troubled by cultural expressions with symbols of ancestral iconography throughout the Urhobo funeral ceremony ranging from *uwgoro* ('announcement of death') by the deceased's children to *ebrovwiotor* ('interment') after the family's approval culminating in *agberen/erhuere* ('the ritual burial'). There is also the pouring of libation¹¹ (drink) and food sacrifice to the ancestors in form of *atiekpe nunu* ('removing sand from the mouth'). The *atiekpe nunu* is prepared as *emarhen* ('mashed yam or plantain mixed with salt and oil')¹² and offered to the deceased and the company of the ancestors first before any other activity.¹³

Other cultural practices include the ritual use of *abiba* ('mat'), *okpo oyibo* ('a piece of white cloth'), the breaking of *evwere* ('traditional dish') by a widow, the act of marching on top of the grave, firmly compacting the earth by *omoshare-okpako* ('eldest son') as a demonstration that he has successfully interred his father/mother, and the preparation of *ihurhe* ('ancestor's figure') to represent the deceased among the Idjerhe-Urhobo.¹⁴

Chapters 7–9 examined the details and significance of these symbols.

⁹ Literally 'waist goat:' the *ehun* ('waist') in this context is used idiomatically to represent 'loins,' referring to the fertility aspect of the sacrifice. Therefore *evwe ehun* is a parenthood goat-sacrifice for the veneration of the deceased father or mother, to honour and eulogise his or her ability to bear children.

¹⁰ Perkins W. Foss, ed., *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal in Urhobo Art* (New York: Museum for African Art, 2004), 10. Others called it 'fourth generation' depending on their starting point to count. But it refers to the burial of a great-great-grand-parent.

¹¹ Libation is the act of pouring drinks on the ground during special occasions like weddings and burials as a token to the ancestral spirits.

¹² *Emarhen* ('mashed yam or plantain mixed with salt and oil') is believed to be a favourite food for spiritual beings (See M. Y. Nabofa and Ben Elugbe, 'Epha: Urhobo System of Divination and its Esoteric Language,' *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 13, No. 1 (June 1981), 3–19: 16). *Emarhen* is meant to soften the anger of the evil forces as well. Its oil content symbolises spiritual lubrication (See Michael P. Adogbo, 'The Signification of Rituals of Destiny among the Urhobo,' *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 35, Nos. 1 and 2 (June and December 2003), 82–92: 88).

¹³ Respondent 1.

¹⁴ Respondent 5.

It however suffices to state that the funeral rituals and symbols of the Urhobo symbolise both the maintenance and the breaking of relationships between the living and the dead. For instance while the pouring of libation, offering of *atiekpe nunu*, use of *abiba*, *okpo-oyibo*, and *ihurhẹ* reinforce the union, the ceremony of breaking *ẹvwẹrẹ* represents the severance of the link. It is important to note that the DSBC/NBC and its local congregations however, do not accept these Urhobo practices and seek to abolish them.

A typical example of differing understanding between an Urhobo Baptist who is culturally inclined and DSBC leaders concerning DSBC/NBC funeral policy occurred in 2007, when a deaconess refused to comply with her local DSBC church leaders on the church's policy of moving corpse from church service straight to grave site. She asked the church not to bury her immediately after church service, but to allow her body to lie-in-state till evening, before interment because she admired the Urhobo funeral rites of dancing and singing by women who surround the corpse to bid farewell. The ministers honoured her request perhaps because she was an influential deaconess. I wondered whether the church has been doing a disservice to other less influential Urhobo Baptists.

There are clear differences between the traditional funeral rites of the Urhobo on the one hand and the DSBC on the other. Urhobo burial rituals are not only to inter the deceased's body but also for the safe passage of its spirit,¹⁵ while for the Baptists, it is only a matter of committing the body to the mother earth because the spirit has gone to its reward whether good or bad. In addition, Urhobo funerals are occasions for family and community members to show their spirit of solidarity within themselves and with the world of ancestors but Baptists do not encourage fellowship between the living and the dead. These differences became obvious at another occasion; the burial of a Baptist

¹⁵ Respondents 2 and 22.

deacon.¹⁶ The Urhobo Baptist pastor and leader¹⁷ in the DSBC, who preached at the ceremony, directed his sermon against the Urhobo people's way of burial and their interest in burial. He understood that the Urhobo celebrate the death of a person, but could not appreciate their joy over death; to him death was a curse on human beings.¹⁸ Therefore, he exhorted the people not to pay such a great deal of attention to 'the carcass.'¹⁹ His message shocked the congregation and the bereaved family members who thought they had done well to give their departed a befitting burial and expected applause from the society and encouragement from the church leaders. Hence, the family could not tolerate the reprimand from the pulpit.

In that same funeral service, a Yorùbá Baptist pastor from Lagos State Baptist Conference (LSBC), whom the family also invited to be part of the ceremony prayed after the sermon and seemed not to have agreed fully with the previous preacher. Earlier in his ministry, the Yorùbá pastor had served among the Urhobo, but had become a leader in LSBC and NBC. He was of the opinion that human beings lacked full understanding of life and death. He expressed this thought during the course of his prayer as he said, 'Father, we do not even understand everything about life, how much more about death.'²⁰ These two NBC leaders, one from DSBC in Urhobo Land and the

¹⁶ This particular reference was the burial of a person of Itsekiri extraction but which took place in a predominantly Urhobo congregation and setting on Saturday, 1 May 2004 in Sapele. All the resident ethnic groups in the Niger Delta area such as the Urhobo, the Itsekiri, the Isoko, the Ukwani and the Ijaw share a common approach to traditional funeral practices, and are equally affected by the NBC/DSBC Burial policy. Hence this research is relevant to them alike. Nevertheless, since the focus of this research is on the Urhobo, the issues affecting the Urhobo are highlighted in detail.

¹⁷ The preacher later published his thoughts. See Gideon O. Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead: Issues in Christian Burial Ceremony* (Lagos: Functional Publishing Company, 2011).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17–19, 21, 111.

¹⁹ He used the word 'carcass' during the sermon but described the corpse as only dust, lifeless and valueless idol in his book (see *Ibid.*, 22–24, 61ff.) He stated further that when somebody dies, the living has no responsibility to its body nor to its spirit except to dispose of the corpse (*Ibid.*, 23–24, 53.).

²⁰ The pastor who prayed was at the time a resident pastor of a local Baptist Church in Lagos and also an officer of the Convention. The thought in this prayer is closed to the one expressed in God's query to Job in 38: 17–18; 'Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.' It is also

other from LSBC in Yorùbá Land, showed different dispositions, opinions and approaches to funeral rites in their respective contexts.

Samuel U. Eriwo (1938–), an Urhobo Anglican priest and a church historian, recognised the similar difference from his denominational perspective. He discovered that while the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) (CON/AC) among the Yorùbá had recognised several Yorùbá traditions including the burial and naming ceremonies, the Anglican pastors among the Urhobo advised church members to ‘have a clean break with the past.’²¹ For instance, Eriwo reported that the practice of presenting a goat to the church choir during funeral ceremonies in Ughelli-Urhobo subculture was cancelled because of the view that it ‘bore too much resemblance to the traditional *ẹ̀wwe re ehun*.’²² The above differing approaches by the two Urhobo and Yorùbá Baptist leaders and the comparative analysis by Eriwo could demonstrate that Yorùbá Baptists had more understanding for Yorùbá funeral traditions than their colleagues in Urhobo Land. Comparing the views of Gideon O. Oyibo (1964–), the president of DSBC which are against Urhobo traditional burial with those of S. T. Ola Akande (1926–), former General Secretary of NBC with funeral sermons filled with Yorùbá traditional worldviews further supports this argument. Oyibo laid much emphasis on Mathew 8: 22 ‘Let the dead bury their dead and encouraged Christians not to have anything to do with traditional burial system. He is of the opinion that burial ceremony is the concern of unbelievers, not Christians. Oyibo believed that Jesus was indifferent to burial ceremony

related to Confucius thought, ‘when asked about death he responded, ‘You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?’ (*Analects*, 11, 12) The commentator explained that ‘Confucius was not dismissive of spirits, gods, or death, but of the presumption that mere human beings could have anything of value to offer them’ (See Frank M. Flanagan, *Confucius, the Analects and Western Education* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 97; Daniel Chi-Sung Chen, ‘A Christian Response to Chinese Ancestor Practices in Taiwan: An Exercise in Contextualization’ (PhD Thesis, E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1998), 118).

²¹ Eriwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 173.

²² *Ibid.*, 173–174.

and that Jesus approach 'should serve as a guide to the church in her attitude to burial practices.'²³ Akande however interacted robustly with Yorùbá ideas in his sermons at funerals. For instance, in one of the sermons, he related Yorùbá song, *Nile lo lo tarara, Mama rele re* (Gone home straight, Mama has gone to her home) with eternal home that Christ prepared for believers as recorded in John's gospel chapter fourteen and with Apostle Paul's concept of 'a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens' in 2 Corinthians 5: 1.²⁴ Therefore, the success of such integration in Yorùbá Land is a positive indication of its reality and realisability in Urhobo Land as well.

It is important to note that the problem that this thesis has addressed is real and current because as recently as 23 February 2012, there was an interruption of a funeral service which a Baptist church from Sapele organised. The deceased member hailed from Idjerhe but certain members of the family disrupted the church programme because of a communication gap between the children of the deceased and the extended family.²⁵ Thus what started as family internal problem eventually affected the church burial programme. It then further underscores the need for Baptist church to promote harmony between the Urhobo families, the church and the community for any burial programme to be successful because burial services are jointly owned and it is only the kind of integration of faith and culture which this thesis advocates that can produce such harmony.

²³ Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead: Issues in Christian Ceremony*, 131.

²⁴ S. T. Ola Akande, *Sermons of Hope and Solace in Times of Hardship, Loneliness or Bereavement: A Selection of Fifty Sermons Preached at Funeral and Other Services Over the Years, Including Discourses on Mysteries About Human Death, Alleged Use of Supernatural Powers to Kill, Dreams as Vehicle to Give Notice of Death, Premonitions of the Coming of Death, Post-Death Appearances (Modern Day Resurrection)* (Ibadan: Agbo Areo Publishers, 2009), 56.

²⁵ Interview with Alvin O. Onojafe and Moses O. Omodibo, Deacons of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Sapele, 14 April, 2012.

However, in the light of the DSBC unfavourable disposition to Urhobo funeral rites as enumerated above, this research studies the Urhobo and Baptist positions in their respective contexts. At the end it is obvious that an integrated approach can produce Urhobo Baptist funeral liturgy and aid contextualization in other rites of passage and even other aspects of the Nigerian Baptist ministry, such as administration, evangelisation, and the like in Urhobo Land.

1.2 The Need and Purpose of the Thesis

This study examines how the deep-rooted religious rituals and the associated Urhobo cultural practices resist changes introduced by new religions such as Christianity. Ali A. Mazrui (1933–) from Kenya and Collins O. Airhihenbuwa, a Nigerian American have both underscored the strong and intrinsic influence of culture on different people. For Mazrui, culture is ‘a system of inter-related values, active enough to influence and condition perception, judgement, communication and behaviour in a given society.’²⁶ Similarly, Airhihenbuwa understood culture as a ‘collective sense of consciousness active enough to influence and condition perception, judgement, communication, behaviour, and expectations and location of power in a given society.’²⁷ Corresponding to this understanding of culture, Michael P. Adogbo emphasised the complexity and interwovenness of the economic, socio-cultural and religious aspects of Urhobo context.²⁸ Other Urhobo scholars like Godwin G. Darah (1947–), Perkins W. Foss and Peter P. Ekeh (1937–) also recognised a common phenomenon of Urhobo attachment to their traditional beliefs in relation to ancestors across church denominational divides.

²⁶ Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 239.

²⁷ Collins O. Airhihenbuwa, *Healing Our Differences: The Crisis of Global Health and the Politics of Identity* (Maryland, USA: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 4.

²⁸ Adogbo, ‘Clairvoyance in Urhobo Traditional Religion,’ 148–149.

Coming from the Roman Catholic Church tradition, Darah, when he was an English Professor at the Delta State University Abraka and specialized in African Literature and Folklore,²⁹ studied the shrines of his own village, Esaba³⁰ in Ughievwen-Urhobo. Esaba had about 1,000 residents maintaining nineteen public and private shrines³¹ in the 1970s. Twenty-four years later, Foss, an ethnographic art curator³² corroborated Darah's point that Urhobo villages are overwhelmed with the presence of gods. Foss observed that an Urhobo village community of about 2,000 inhabitants 'would pay allegiance to four or five distinct spirits and a small town (of perhaps five hundred) would have one or two.'³³ Foss was conservative with his estimate but the emphasis of Darah and Foss is that there is hardly any Urhobo community that lacks shrines of the Urhobo traditional religions. Ekeh, the founding chair of Urhobo Historical Society³⁴ and who is also a Roman Catholic Christian, concluded that Pentecostal Christianity is unable to replace the

²⁹ Peter P. Ekeh, ed., *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, (Lagos: Urhobo Historical Society, 2005), 746. Darah served as president, Nigerian Folklore Society (1988–1995), Special adviser on Public Communication (2003–2004) and Chief of Staff to Delta State Government (2004–2005).

³⁰ Godwin G. Darah, 'Shrines of Esaba,' in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal in Urhobo Art*, ed. Perkins Foss, 53–57: 54.

³¹ The shrines listed by Darah include *Olokun Shrine, Edovie Shrine, Oghene Pole, Oqwan Ovworho*, Private *Igbe Healing Home, Oqwan Itine, Agbragha Shrine, Waka's Private Shrine, Edjo-Oto* ('Earth god'), *Edjokpa* ('Palm-Produce Shrine'), *Uduvwontu Family Shrine, Arhude Shrine, Emoghwe Family Shrine, Oqwan Emoghwe, Private Igbe Ritual Home, Iphri keeper's Home, Oqwan Ipeghe, Aghwarode*, and *Masquerade Grove*. Though this work was published in 2004, interview with the author shows his work points to the 1970s.

³² Foss was a U. S. Peace Corps Volunteer at the Nigerian Museum in Lagos in 1965. He studied the culture of the Urhobo since 1960s and won Urhobo affection and honoured with two Urhobo chieftaincy titles. The titles are *Oyiboredjo*, ('the white man of the gods') of Orogun-Urhobo and *Unugbedjo* ('Mouthpiece of gods') of Evwreni-Urhobo. See Foss, ed., *Where Gods and Mortals Meet*, 145; Ekeh, Peter P. [Compiler], 'Perkins Foss: A Photo Gallery of 4th UHS Annual Conference,' held in London, United Kingdom, October 31 – November 2, 2003, available from http://www.waado.org/urhobo_community/archive/photos/conferences/4th_annual/foss.htm, Internet, accessed 3 January 2012.

³³ Perkins Foss, 'An Introduction to the Urhobo,' in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet*, ed. Perkins Foss, 17–29: 27.

³⁴ Ekeh is also the editor of Urhobo Historical society websites and a professor of political science in the Department of African American Studies at the State University of New York, Buffalo. Ekeh as the major compiler works with other Urhobo scholars held that Urhobo language and culture has been neglected by the nineteenth century European anthropologists, ethnographers and linguists in Nigeria. They therefore act as Urhobo vanguards to show case Urhobo history and culture firstly to preserve it for posterity, and secondly to create its awareness for the international communities. Two of the publications that exemplified these goals are Peter P. Ekeh, ed., *Studies in Urhobo Culture* (2005) and *History of the Urhobo People of Niger Delta* (2006).

Urhobo primal belief system in ancestral shrines.³⁵ Darah reported that converts to the God's Grace Christian Ministry (GGCM) destroyed two of Esaba shrines in 2004.³⁶ He identified the struggles 'between the adherents of the old and the new cultural attitudes in Esaba' as typical of what occurs in other Urhobo communities.³⁷ Darah further revealed that as at 2011, only about five of the shrines have been destroyed or abandoned, leaving about twelve shrines still active in the Esaba community.³⁸ Among the shrines listed by Darah were family shrines and *egwan* ('family halls,' singular, *ogwan*) which housed *eshẹ* ('ancestor shrines'). Therefore, it is important to note that from 1970s till now (2012), the number of Urhobo traditional religious shrines may reduce, but associated beliefs like spiritual devotion to the ancestors remain.

The section on rituals in Appendix 3 further shows that all Urhobo subcultures have rituals that relate to the ancestors,³⁹ but it suffices here to highlight that of Idjerhe. According to a respondent,⁴⁰ Idjerhe community has *ughe-oku* festival celebrated in honour of *okunovu* (goddess of the river) every February. He stated further that the shrine of *okunovu* is near the tree 'planted upside down' by Onovwo, the founder.⁴¹ The connection underlines the concept of high regard for their founding ancestor. Okunovo and founders of other Urhobo sub-cultures are not in the group categorised by Charles H. Long,⁴² as 'Mythic ancestors'—primordialities or deities who created 'the general and

³⁵ Peter P. Ekeh, 'Fresh Perspectives on Urhobo Culture,' in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal in Urhobo Art*, ed. Perkins Foss, 11–13: 13.

³⁶ Godwin G. Darah, interview by author, 6 March 2011.

³⁷ Darah, 'Shrines of Esaba,' 57.

³⁸ Darah, Interview, 6 March 2011.

³⁹ See Appendix 3, Table of Features of Urhobo *ikpotọ*.

⁴⁰ Respondent 5.

⁴¹ Ibid; S.U. Erivwo, 'Idjerhe,' in *The Urhobo People*, 57.

⁴² Charles H. Long is an emeritus professor of religious studies of the University of Chicago, who specialises in history of religions and African and Afro-American religions. See 'The Regents of the University of California,' Department of Religious Studies, available from <http://www.religion.ucsb.edu/emeriti.htm>, Internet, accessed on 3 January, 2012.

universal human conditions,' but they certainly belonged to the group of human ancestors who were 'founders of clans, families, moieties, and other segments of human community'⁴³ and are treated by their descendants as culture heroes. They were also believed to have been assisted by divine forces and therefore some forms of unusual power were attributed to them. For instance, the fact that the tree planted upside down by Onovo sprouted was seen as evidence of spiritual power. The presence and maintenance of the shrine of *okunovu* in Idjerhe until the present time is an indication that the people still acknowledge the powers and the personalities involved and that the present generation is yet rooted in the beliefs of their ancestors. Even where due to Christian faith, the physical shrines are destroyed, there are still manifestations of beliefs associated with the traditional shrines and this phenomenon is entrenched among the Urhobo.

With the above records of Urhobo scholars and continuous maintenance of traditional rituals and festivals, the main thrust in this section is to acknowledge and understand the prominent role of Urhobo traditional religions in the formation of Urhobo context as a 'web of significance'⁴⁴ in which the Urhobo socio-economic, psycho-religious, and geo-political and cultural strings are interlocked. This kind of cultural web has long been recognised as a universal human experience. For instance, Bronislaw K. Malinowski (1884–1942) identified the similar principle in his study of the different aspects of Kula institution of the Trobrianders, especially the 'economic enterprise and magical ritual'

⁴³ Charles H. Long, 'Mythic Ancestors,' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1, ed. Mircea Eliade, 268–270 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 269. Reprinted in Charles H. Long, 'Mythic Ancestors,' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1, 2nd ed. Lindsay Jones, 325–327 (Detroit, Michigan: Thomson Gale Corporation, 2005), 326.

⁴⁴ The term 'web of significance' was coined by Max Weber (1864–1920, a German sociologist and political economist) but Clifford Geertz interpreted that web as culture. See Clifford Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

which were ‘closely intertwined and influencing one another.’⁴⁵ The emphasis is that this cultural web is a reality that cannot be ignored. Rather it is better explored and cultivated in a meaningful way.

Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (1953–) argued similar point among the Africans generally that ‘religion and culture are inextricably interwoven in the African indigenous mindset.’⁴⁶ Therefore, the African Christian ‘often walks with one foot in African religion and culture and another in the church and Western culture.’⁴⁷ Paul Hiebert (1932–2007), Daniel Shaw (1943–) and Tite Tiénou observed that this problem leads to ‘split-level Christianity,’ ‘religious schizophrenia,’ ‘two-tier Christianity,’ and ‘high religion/low religion dualism’⁴⁸ among different people groups who have embraced Christianity or ‘divided loyalties’ among the Igbo Christians of South Eastern Nigeria according to Cyril C. Okorochoa.⁴⁹ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou stated that, ‘old ways do not die out, but remain largely hidden from public view (thus making Christianity) an overlay, and the two exist in uneasy tension’⁵⁰ caused by the concepts of colonialism, enlightenment and cultural evolution,⁵¹ prevalent at the time Christianity spread to non Euro-American worlds.⁵² To Kanyoro, it is a dilemma that has destructive tendency if not well managed, using the analogy of a proverbial hyena which ran ‘astride the two paths [and] split in the middle’⁵³ in the course of following the enticing aroma of barbecuing meat.⁵⁴

⁴⁵ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Malesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1922), 515.

⁴⁶ Kanyoro, ‘Engendered Communal Theology,’ 19.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, Robert Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 15–16, 20, 88.

⁴⁹ Cyril C. Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria* (Aldershot: Avebury Gower, 1987), 267–268.

⁵⁰ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 13.

⁵¹ Ibid., 16–17.

⁵² Ibid., 18f. Hiebert and others argued for an approach of ‘critical contextualization’ and guide against ‘syncretism’ or ‘Christopaganism.’ These terms are discussed below in this chapter, section 1.3.5.

⁵³ Kanyoro, ‘Engendered Communal Theology,’ 19.

The non recognition of this reality or its seriousness by the DSBC among the Urhobo Baptists has created a religious/cultural dichotomy in their funeral rites. The dichotomy is manifested as Urhobo Baptist members, after performing the church funeral rites, return home to perform other Urhobo traditional rites without informing the church. Secondly, families have turned apart during burials of Baptist members because of disagreements which normally ensue between the Baptist church and the family of the deceased or between the Christians and non-Christian members of the same family. There are other cases in addition to the experiences already narrated in section 1.1 above which underscore the profoundness of the Urhobo Baptists' devotion to their traditional belief system relating to funeral and the consequent conflict with the Baptist norm. For instance, in 2009, a woman narrated how the death of a prominent young man in her family was attributed to the failure to perform the burial of his father who died many years before. Therefore, before they buried the young man, they needed first to perform the traditional burial rites for his father. The family carried out the ritual burial of the father without informing the church or inviting any church member because they knew the church did not approve such practice. They however performed the burial of the young man in the church later, when they felt they have satisfied the cultural requirement.⁵⁵ There was another case in 2011 of a young lawyer who died and it was attributed to his non-performance of his own father's burial as well.⁵⁶ These practices are reflections of Urhobo primal religious beliefs which Baptist church has not been able to remove and has not also properly address.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Members of this family belonged to different churches but some of them who participated in the family programme belonged to Baptist church as well.

⁵⁶ Respondent 5. The church affiliation of the young lawyer was not specified but the incident indicates the current practices among the Urhobo. They suspect there must be a reason for an untimely death. They also feel strongly that if parents' burials are not done properly, it causes problem which may be as serious as death for the children.

The tension between the Urhobo burial practices and the DSBC/NBC funeral policy calls for an adequate contextualization of Baptist faith. Instead of allowing discord to continue, Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou suggested to the Church ‘to develop beliefs and rituals that strengthen families against the onslaught of individualism.’⁵⁷ They also rightly suggested that Christian rites should be ‘expressed in the cultural symbols and idioms of the people.’⁵⁸ Their suggestion could be helpful in Urhobo setting because it underscores the importance of family ties. However, their reduction of other world religions to ‘folk religions’⁵⁹ with ‘animistic’⁶⁰ beliefs only concerned with life crisis and not things of ultimate reality like where the dead have gone⁶¹ undermine the capacity of mutual enrichment between those ‘folk religions’ and Christianity. Again, Urhobo traditional religions like Christianity also address issues of ‘ultimate reality’ like the concept of *erivwin* (‘spiritual abode’) as the final destination of the dead. A key argument of this study is that certain vital aspects of Urhobo funeral rites that affirm their identity, dignity, nature and character could be integrated into the Baptist funeral processes. This integration is possible, valuable and could produce three principal effects, namely, (1) discouraging dual funeral faith practices among Urhobo Baptists, (2) meeting the DSBC concern for undivided loyalty from its members and (3) leading to gaining more converts from among the Urhobo who have hitherto refused to embrace Baptist faith because of its non-welcoming attitude to Urhobo funeral culture. In order to develop this discussion further, it is necessary to clarify the major concepts relating to ‘Pan Africanism versus a particular ethnic community in Africa,’ NBC, DSBC, ‘Contextualisation,’ and ‘Cultural Contextualisation in Urhobo funeral context.’

⁵⁷ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 130.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

1.3 Clarifying Words and Concepts used in this Thesis

1.3.1 Pan-Africanism versus a particular ethnic community in Africa

The word 'Africa' or 'Africans' in this research retains the meaning the scholar under reference in each case attributed. Otherwise, specific ethnicities are named and discussed. Darah highlighted the importance of specificity as against generalisation in African oral literary criticism. He observed that the 'indiscriminate lumping together of societies' can obscure significant differences in the socio-economic structure and the kind of literature of people of different nationalities.⁶² Therefore, it is no longer appropriate to generalise an experience for the fifty-six different countries that make up the African continent. Darah highlighted the need for an in-depth study of different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups, such as this study with its special reference to the Idjerhe-Urhobo Baptists.

1.3.2 The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC)

The NBC is the Nigerian national body that administers all the Baptist congregations that are part of its cooperative funding and mission programmes.⁶³ Its administration is run in four steps from the local congregation to the regional judicatories in the form of the 'Association,' and the 'Conference'⁶⁴ and then to the national assembly known as the Convention. NBC grew out of the missionary outreach of the Southern Baptist

⁶² Darah, 'The Political-Economic Factor in Urhobo Song-Poetry,' 471.

⁶³ The programme of cooperative funding by the NBC is a collective decision by all the churches involved that each local church should remit twenty percent of its tithes and offerings to the Convention, four percent to the Conference and six percent to the Association. The percentage contribution may vary in the Conferences and the Associations.

⁶⁴ 'Association' consists 'of not less than six organised Baptist Churches all geographically contiguous with at least three full-time pastors of whom must be ordained,' while the 'Conference' consists 'of churches in a given geographical area organised into at least six Baptist associations with not less than seven full-time trained pastors of whom at least six shall be ordained' (See The Nigerian Baptist Convention, *The Constitution and Bye-Laws*, (Approved at Aba, Imo State on 29 April, 1994 with Approvals of 1995–2000) (Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nig.) Ltd., 1994), 4–5).

Convention (SBC) from Richmond, Virginia, United States of America (USA).⁶⁵ Their pioneering missionary was Thomas Jefferson Bowen (1814–1875) who arrived in the Yorùbá cities of Abeokuta and Ijaye in 1850.⁶⁶ Consequently, this ecclesial community first took the name *Yorùbá Baptist Association* in 1914 but became the *Nigerian Baptist Convention* in 1919 because by that time, the NBC Churches were established in other regions of Nigeria.⁶⁷

Starting with 2012 Convention, the ceremonial head of the Nigerian Baptist Convention formerly called the ‘President’ has changed to the ‘Chairman,’ while the nomenclature for the executive/administrative head changed from ‘General Secretary’ to ‘President.’⁶⁸ Rev. Dr. Uche B. Enyioha (1950–), the President⁶⁹ from 2009 changed to Chairman and Rev. Dr. Supo Ayokunle (1954–), General Secretary⁷⁰ from 2011 changed to President. The NBC is also simply called ‘The Convention’ in this research.

⁶⁵ S. Ademola Ajayi, ‘The place of Ogbomoso in Baptist Missionary Enterprise in Nigeria,’ *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies*, 8 (2011), 16–38: 18, 33.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey, Johnston. ‘Thomas Jefferson Bowen 1814 to 1875 Baptist, Nigerian,’ *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, available from http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/bowen_thomas.html, Internet, accessed on 4 February 2012.

⁶⁷ I. A. Adedoyin, *A Short History of the Nigerian Baptist: Baptist Heritage Series 3* (Ibadan: Nigerian Baptist Bookstore Limited, 1998), 18f.

⁶⁸ *Nigerian Baptist Convention 99th Annual Convention Session: Book of Reports* (held at Baptist Academy Compound, Obanikoro, Lagos, 21–26 April 2012), 2, item 4.

⁶⁹ The past presidents of the Nigerian Baptist Convention and their years in office since inception are Mojola Agbèbi (1914–1916), Luise Duvas (1916–1936), George Green (General Superintendent, 1936–1944), Dr. Iva Newburn Patterson (also General Superintendent, 1944–1950), Dr. James Tanimola Ayorinde (starts as President, 1950–1955), S. A. Lawoyin (1955–1963), Emmanuel Ajayi Dahunsi (1964–1969), E. O. Agboola (1969–1970), E. A. Akingbala (1971–1976), S. T. Ola Akande (1977–1979), O. O. Imasogie (1979–1985), David H. Karo (1985–1991), Clifford T. T. George (1991–1997), E. O. Bolarinwa (1997–2003), Y. A. Obaje (2003–2007), R. I. Chuga (2007–2009). It could be observed as stated by Travis Collins and as shown in the above list that the office of the president was changed to that of General Superintendent (1936–1949) and occupied by the American missionaries. The Nigerian nationals took over as presidents of the NBC since 1950 starting with J. T. Ayorinde. (Adedoyin, *A Short History of the Nigerian Baptist: Baptist Heritage Series 3*, 24–25; Travis Collins, *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria, 1850–1993: A History of the Southern Baptist Convention Missionary Work in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Nigerian Baptist Bookstores Ltd., 1993), 59; Olaseni O. Egbeyemi, *S. T. Ola Akande-Agent of Change* (Ibadan: GLJ General Services Ltd, 1996), 342–343). Other sources include interviews with Samuel S. Tama, the Convention Assistant General Secretary, Administration (1996–2007), 5 June 2011 and Testimony Olusoji O. Onifade, the Ekiti State Baptist Conference Secretary (1999–2003) and Osun (2004–), 3 July 2011).

⁷⁰ The previous General Secretaries and their years in office are Dr. Iva Newburn Patterson (1950–1964), Dr. J. T. Ayorinde (1964–1975), E. A. Dahunsi (1975–1979), Rev. Dr. S. T. Ola Akande (1979–

1.3.3 The Delta State Baptist Conference (DSBC)

The DSBC oversees all the NBC churches within the Delta State. It was jointly created in 1992 with a sister conference, Edo State Baptist Conference (ESBC), out of the former Bendel Baptist Conference (BBC). Like ‘The Convention,’ DSBC too is led by ceremonial and executive/administrative heads called the Conference Chairman and the Conference Secretary respectively. The first sets of officers for the DSBC were appointed in 1993. Rev. John E. Amromare (1940–), who was the Conference Secretary of BBC till it got subdivided into the two new Conferences, led the DSBC from 1993 to 2003. As a Baptist and a member of Idjerhe-Urhobo, he has provided valuable insights into what led the DSBC to stop the practice of the Urhobo traditional night burials for the deceased members of the Baptist Churches in its jurisdiction. The details will be discussed in chapter seven, section 7.2.6.

The current Conference Chairman⁷¹ from 2011 is Rev. Paul Friday Anyasi (1968–) while Rev. Gideon Ogheneruemu Oyibo serves as the Conference Secretary since 2003 but his designation has also changed to ‘Conference President’ in line with the Convention new policy as stated above. He oversees the day-to-day activities of the Conference and is accountable to the Conference Executive Council and to the Convention President. The DSBC is a Baptist faith community with its own sense of ecclesial identity. It is however operating among different people with their own sense of cultural identities. It is therefore necessary to fathom a system of cordiality and the

1991. An eye witness oral account stated that Rev. Dr. H. O. Olaniyi acted as General Secretary (1990–1991), Rev. Dr. S. Ola Fadeji (1991–2001), Rev. Dr. Solomon Ademola Ishola (2001–2011) (Ibid).

⁷¹ The former Chairmen of the DSBC and their years in office are Rev. P. E. Ofuoku (1993–1997), Rev. J. A. Pajiah (1997–2002), Rev. W. A. Ikpen (2002–2008), and Rev. Dr. Gilbert I. Oghifo (2008–2011).

concept of contextualisation is adopted as a useful instrument in this thesis to accomplish that friendliness between Baptist faith and Urhobo culture.

1.3.4 Understanding the concept of contextualization

The Theological Education Fund (TEF)⁷² in 1972, led by Shoki Coe, coined the term contextualization⁷³ to express the mission of the Euro American Church in their secular context, practically responding to the challenges posed by technology, human rights violations, militarization, socio-economic and political revolutions, and the like. The word contextualization is inseparably linked to the interdependent and interwoven

⁷² The TEF was founded during the Accra Assembly of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1958. It became the Programme on Theological Education (PTE) in 1977 and Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) in 1991 (See Dietrich Werner, 'Theological Education in the Changing Context of World Christianity—An Unfinished Agenda,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35 no. 2 (April 2011), 92–100: 93).

⁷³ *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970–77)* (London: New Life Press, 1972), 19–20. Despite the appearance of contextualization in the mission debates in 1972, scholars such as Alan Neely, a missiologist, Osadolor Imasogie, Darrell L. Whiteman, Max L. Stackhouse and Stephen Bevans think that the notion that the concept conveys is as old as the history of Christianity. They rooted contextualization in Jesus' life and ministry and the subsequent experiences of the early apostles. Consequently, they viewed Christianity as an incarnational and contextual religion. Practical examples cited include the Pentecost day experience with reference to the Holy Spirit baptism and the consequent diverse tongues similar to the various languages of the audience, the New Testament contextual writings, the Bible translations, the doctrine of Christ's incarnation and the adaptable nature of the church as it moves to the different cultures and civilisations. Bevans specifically observed that contextual theology is both new and traditional and illustrated its perennial aspect with the different theological formulations and styles of writing in the Hebrew Scriptures, citing the examples of the Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, and Wisdom theologies as well as the difference between Paul's and James' writing styles as the manifestation of contextualization ideals long before its technical usage in 1972. (See Alan Neely, 'What is a Context and what is Contextualization?' *Christian Mission: A Case Study Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995, reprinted, 1997), 3; Osadolor Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1986), 14; Darrell L. Whiteman, 'Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 21, no. 1 (January 1997), 2–7: 2; Max L. Stackhouse, 'Contextualization, Contextuality and Contextualism,' in *One Faith, Many Cultures: Inculturation, Indigenization and Contextualization*, Annual Series, 2, ed. Ruy O. Costa, 3–13 (Cambridge, MA: Boston Theological Institute, 1988), 4–5; and Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev. and Exp. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 7–8). Andrew F. Walls clearly presented the evidence of cultural diversity which automatically necessitated contextualization in both the 'Bi-cultural' setting of New Testament Church and the 'Multicultural' setting of the Early Church (See Andrew F. Walls, 'World Christianity and the Early Church,' in *A New Day: Essays on World Christianity in Honour of Lamin Sanneh*, eds. Lamin Sanneh, Andrew F. Walls, Akintunde E. Akintunde, 17–30 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), 18–22. Dongsun Cho succinctly defined contextualization as 'the contemporization of the gospel for a present-day audience, especially in non-Western cultures' (Dongsun Cho, 'Contextualization,' Glossary in *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study* by James Leo Garret (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2009), xv).

particularities of a context (derived from Latin. *con-texere*, ‘weaving together’).⁷⁴ Max Lynn Stackhouse, a social scientist, has identified ‘regionality, nationality, cultural linguistic history, ethnicity, political system, economic class, gender identity, social status,’ and others⁷⁵ as constitutive elements of a context, which in turn helps us to comprehend the complex meaning of *contextualization*

To convey ideas similar to that of contextualization, scholars have in the past used different terms which include transplanting the gospel, translation,⁷⁶ vernacularization, accommodation,⁷⁷ adaptation,⁷⁸ indigenisation,⁷⁹ autochthonization, Africanisation,⁸⁰

⁷⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Vol. 3, s.v. ‘Context.’

⁷⁵ Stackhouse, ‘Contextualization, Contextuality and Contextualism,’ 10.

⁷⁶ Dean S. Gilliland and Stephen B. Bevans presented ‘Translation’ as one of the models of contextualisation. Others are Anthropological, Praxis, Adaptation, Synthetic, Semiotic, Critical, Transcendental and Countercultural Models. Gilliland cited the concepts of ‘dynamic equivalent’ by Charles Kraft and ‘form and meaning’ by Paul G. Hiebert as part of the linguistic dimensions of the translation model. Gilliland highlighted the strength of the translation model as equipping Christian leaders to address ‘the problems raised in their own cultures.’ However, Gilliland expressed some criticisms of the translation model which include his feeling that ‘the bible is not taken seriously enough,’ the view that the application of the dynamic equivalence concept may become too elastic, and the difficulty of ascertaining the ‘kernel’ of the gospel so as to apply it to all cultures. (Dean S. Gilliland, ‘Contextualization models,’ appendix to *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, ed. Dean S. Gilliland, 313–317. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 314; Paul G. Hiebert, ‘Form and Meaning in Contextualization of the Gospel,’ in *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, ed. Dean S. Gilliland, 101–120: 102–105; Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 103–137).

⁷⁷ An example of the principle of accommodation is found in the letter of Pope Gregory in 601 C.E. to the abbot Mellitus in which the Pope counselled Augustine of Canterbury to destroy only the Saxon idols, but to adapt their temples and festivals ‘for the worship of the true God’ hoping that the retention of the people’s ‘outward joy’ might lead them to ‘the true inner joy.’ Roman Catholic Jesuit missionaries like Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and Roberto de Nobili 1577–1656) supported accommodation model among the Chinese and the Indian Christians respectively but the Franciscans did not. (See Neely, ‘What is a Context and what is Contextualization?’ 5–6; Paul G. Hiebert, ‘Critical Contextualization,’ *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (July, 1987), 104–112: 104). For the ministry of Matteo Ricci in China and the ‘Rites Controversy’ that followed in the Eighteenth century, see Chen, ‘A Christian Response to Chinese Ancestor Practices in Taiwan, 38–45).

⁷⁸ Gilliland underscored that adaptation model fits ‘the historical foci of systematic theology into [...] particular cultural situations,’ thereby demanding the ‘local theologian’ to ‘first be trained in Western theology.’ Thus adaptation model’s idea that all cultures are bound to interact within a singular ‘philosophical framework’ becomes a weakness because it calls the legitimacy of other forms of knowledge into question. (See Gilliland, ‘Contextualization models,’ 315).

⁷⁹ Indigenisation and autochthonization are synonymous as the art of making a thing, an action, an idea, or a value from one culture to become native to another. However, autochthonization has different meaning among the Spanish and the Portuguese, where it refers particularly to the American Indians. (See Neely, ‘What is a Context and what is Contextualization?’ 6).

inculturation, and enculturation⁸¹ before contextualization. There is now a call to go beyond contextualization into what is called ‘missional perspective.’⁸² In support of the view of the similarity of ideas despite change in terminologies, Simon Shui-man Kwan⁸³ did not perceive the shift from indigenization to contextualisation as paradigm shift, but as a shift as of only ‘time’ and ‘space-discursive site’ from the ‘local’ to ‘the third world’ peculiarities.⁸⁴

Meanwhile, scholars are not unanimous about the appropriateness of the term contextualization. Sarpong preferred inculturation as the most appropriate term on the premises that contextualization may dwell so much on the present context as to neglect the past which forms the historical background to that context.⁸⁵ He however was not explicit on how his understanding of inculturation addressed what he regarded as the shortfall of contextualization. Charles H. Kraft also thought that contextualization

⁸⁰ The concept of Africanisation did not help much, comments Sarpong, because of its ‘racial overtone,’ complexity and presumptuousness due to the variety of cultures within Africa. (See Kopetzky, ‘Inculturation of Liturgy: The Ghanaian Experience,’ talk delivered by Peter K. Sarpong, 3).

⁸¹ The Roman Catholic ‘inculturation’ and the Reformed Churches ‘enculturation’ mean the same. Catalino G. Arévalo, an Asian theologian defines inculturation as ‘the process of letting the local Church be [itself], assuming responsibility, within the *koinonia* of all the churches in the *catholica*, to ‘realize itself’ in its own life and mission. (See James H. Kroeger, ‘Local Church, Dialogue and Conversion,’ *Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) Papers, No. 107, 7*, available from <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-107.htm>, Internet, accessed 9 June 2011); Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, New & Rev. Ed. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2003), 115–117. ‘The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the theological basis for inculturation’ (Ibid., 122).

⁸² R. Daniel Shaw, ‘Beyond Contextualization: Toward a Twenty-first-Century Model for Enabling Mission,’ *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 4 (October 2010), 208–215: 212. Shaw called for a re-examination of the understanding of contextualisation to give room to incarnational principles of allowing the Christians ‘to contemplate the implications of God-in-their-midst’ rather than ‘reconfiguring local cultural forms to fit the shape of Christianity’ (Ibid., 211). He argued that the end product will be ‘biblical theology in context’ instead of ‘contextual theology’ (Ibid., 212). Shaw’s analysis appears to be some sort of play on words because ‘contextual theology’ could as well mean ‘biblical theology in a context.’ Of course, it is obvious that the emphasis of the contextual theologians is on the biblical theology in their contexts.

⁸³ Simon Shui-man Kwan is Assistant Professor, Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong and Programme Coordinator/Director of the Programme For Theology And Cultures In Asia. His main research interest is Asian theologies and contextual theologies.

⁸⁴ Simon Shui-man Kwan, ‘From Indigenization to Contextualization: a Change in Discursive Practice rather than a Paradigm Shift,’ *Studies in World Christianity*, 11, no. 2 (October 2005), 236–250: 247.

⁸⁵ Kopetzky, ‘Inculturation of Liturgy: The Ghanaian Experience,’ talk delivered by Peter K. Sarpong, 3.

carries ‘less historical baggage than other words’ like indigenisation or inculturation.⁸⁶ Thus, the lack of concentrated attention to the historical past which Sarpong perceived as the weakness of the concept of contextualization is what Kraft understood to be its strength. For Stephen B. Bevans, contextualization is all-embracing, including the cultural, secular, socio-economic, political and technological contexts.⁸⁷

1.3.5 Cultural contextualization in Urhobo funeral context

This research includes cultural elements into the rubric of contextualization.⁸⁸ The cultural phenomenon in contextualization influenced Osadolor O. Imasogie (1928–) also, who postulated that a relevant Christian theology to the Africans must take African worldview and self-understanding into consideration, in order to produce a ‘fit’ between theology and life.⁸⁹ Imasogie disapproved the indifferent attitude of the founding missionaries⁹⁰ to the traditional culture of their converts. He explained that the theology of the SBC missionaries from USA was influenced by the early nineteenth century

⁸⁶ Paul P. Pierson, ‘Sketching the Life of Charles H. Kraft,’ *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness: Insights from Anthropology, Communication, and Spiritual Power: Essays in Honor of Charles H. Kraft*, eds. Charles E. Van Engen, Darrell Whiteman, J. Dudley Woodberry, xxi–xxix (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), xxv–xxvi.

⁸⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 26.

⁸⁸ The cultural approach is supported by Vatican II, Dean S. Gilliland, Charles H. Kraft, Anthony O. Erhueh (1938–) an Urhobo Roman Catholic priest, and Osadolor O. Imasogie. For the Roman Catholic reference, see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (‘Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,’), Art. 37 (December 4, 1963), 8, available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, Internet, accessed 26 May 2011; Pope John Paul II, *A Pilgrim Pope: Messages for the World*, eds. Achille Silvestrini and Jerome M. Vereb (Kansas City: K. S. Giniger Company Inc. in association with Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1999), 18 and 265.

⁸⁹ Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 12.

⁹⁰ The CMS/Anglican founding missionaries to Yorùbá Land consisted of the Europeans and freed African slaves but with European supervision. The ‘CMS Niger Mission’ which worked in Urhobo Land through ‘the Niger Delta Pastorate’ broke away from CMS Mission and was formed by Africans as a way of curbing European supervision. The Baptist Missions in Nigeria were carried out by the Southern and National Baptist Conventions, U. S. A., but the Nigerian Baptist Convention is the product of the Southern Baptist (See Robinson, Charles Henry *History of Christian Mission* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1915), 294–298).

Enlightenment⁹¹ and was ineffective in Africa.⁹² Andrew F. Walls (1928–) similarly identified the deficiency of the Western theological tradition in the African context because as he explained, ‘it is too small for the operating systems of Africa and indeed, of most of the world.’⁹³

With the views espoused by scholars like Gilliland,⁹⁴ Kraft,⁹⁵ Erhueh⁹⁶ and Imasogie,⁹⁷ it is evident that the concept of contextualisation nowadays transcends the original economic and political meaning prevalent in the 1970s and includes socio-cultural elements such as funeral rites. Therefore, by calling for contextualization of funeral liturgy in this thesis, I argue that the NBC through its Christian witness should creatively interact with and relate its tenets of faith to the socio-cultural and psycho-religious aspects of the Idjerhe-Urhobo funeral rites. I therefore opt for the term contextualization despite the cultural nature of the subject of funeral because culture itself is as dynamic

⁹¹ The Age of Enlightenment starting in eighteenth century was characterised by dualism, the ‘separation between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ realities,’ between science and religion, and between facts and faith (Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 16–17). Because of the Enlightenment thinking, the Euro-American missionaries ‘often denied the existence of (evil) spirits rather than claim the power of Christ over them’ and their ‘missions became a major secularizing force’ (Ibid., 90).

⁹² Osadolor Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 47. Imasogie termed the outcome of the missionaries’ Enlightenment theology the ‘Quasi-scientific world view’ which rejects the biblical worldview of the reality of the ‘interaction between man and spiritual forces of both evil and good.’ The biblical worldview is similar to the African worldview. (Ibid., 48). What Imasogie described as ‘quasi-scientific world view’ in the nineteenth century corresponds with what Paul G. Hiebert analyses of the ‘wedding of Christianity and science in the minds of missionaries’ about the same period, occasioned by ‘the triumph of science.’ (See Paul G. Hiebert, ‘Critical Contextualization,’ *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 11, no. 3 (July, 1987), 104–112: 105).

⁹³ Andrew F. Walls, ‘Worldview and Christian Conversion,’ in *Mission in Context: Explorations Inspired by J. Andrew Kirk*, eds., Andrew Kirk, John Corrie, Cathy Ross, 155–165 (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), 165. Walls was the founding Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the non-Western World at the University of Edinburgh (1997–2001) and is presently a Professor of World Christianity and History of Missions at Liverpool Hope University, Akrofi-Christaller Institute in Ghana and African International University, Nairobi, Kenya. (See Andrew Kirk, John Corrie, Cathy Ross, *Mission in Context: Explorations Inspired by J. Andrew Kirk*, xiv).

⁹⁴ Gilliland, ‘Contextual Theology as Incarnational Mission,’ 18, 313.

⁹⁵ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), xxiii–xxv and 28.

⁹⁶ Anthony O. Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man, An Inquiry into the Theological Foundations and Significance of Human Dignity in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, ‘Gaudium et Spes’* (Rome: Urbanian University Press, 1987), 259–260, 275, and 307.

⁹⁷ Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 12, 18–19.

as contextualization and interrelated with other aspects of the people's context. Gailyn Van Rheenen highlighted the view that the contextualization approach may differ depending on where one places the emphasis. When it is on the scripture, biblical meanings are translated into contemporary cultural contexts, using the cultural images, metaphors, rituals, and sayings 'to make the message both understandable and impactful.'⁹⁸ But when it is on the cultural setting, 'God's meaning is sought experientially within the culture using the Bible as a guide.'⁹⁹ Although, as Van Rheenen observed, because of the Evangelicals' view of the scripture as the sole authority, they often regard the second option above as syncretistic,¹⁰⁰ this research argues that with the aid of the Holy Spirit, an agent of true contextualization could need both approaches either separately or together depending on the issue and the situation at hand. Nevertheless, cultural contextualization requires caution as Rheenen warned that 'an over-emphasis upon the cultural context can lead to syncretism.'¹⁰¹

Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou defined 'Syncretism' or 'Christopaganism' as uncritical combination of 'elements of Christianity with folk beliefs and practices in such a way that the gospel loses its integrity and message.'¹⁰² They however thought that Christians should desist from outright condemnation of or simply ignoring the 'folk beliefs and practices' or uncritical acceptance but to deal with the problem with the instrument of 'critical contextualization' with its components of phenomenological analysis, ontological critique with Scriptures and objective reality tests, evaluative

⁹⁸ Gailyn Van Rheenen, 'Contextualization and Syncretism: The Church on a Journey Defining Itself,' in *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents*, ed. Gailyn Van Rheenen, 1–28 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 3–4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰² Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 378.

response, and transformative ministries.¹⁰³ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou thought that in order to guide against syncretism, the emphasis of theology should be on Christ and Scripture, and not human's experience.¹⁰⁴ It is however difficult to neatly separate syncretism from contextualization since both involve 'the convergence of Christian beliefs and practices with beliefs and/or practices from other worldview sources.'¹⁰⁵ There is even a tendency for one theologian to understand him/herself as a contextualizer and critique others as syncretizers. Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou also recognised the subtle nature of the difference.¹⁰⁶ It is important to note that while Hendrik M. Vroom argued that contextual theologies are naturally syncretistic, knowing that 'cultures are not closed entities but syncretistic throughout,'¹⁰⁷ he concluded (1) that not every contextualization is syncretistic in the negative sense, and (2) that contextualizations are legitimate but have to be reconsidered time and again.¹⁰⁸

With the above understanding and for the present context of an Urhobo funeral rite, the definition of Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou is adopted, combining the common beliefs and practices between Baptist faith and Urhobo culture in a way that the gospel does not lose its integrity and message. Therefore, the critical liturgical contextualization starts with the phenomenological understanding of *Uruemu r'eshio r'Urhobo* ('Urhobo Burial Tradition') and its constituent parts like the *evwe ehun*, *sakpregodi*, *erhuerhe* and others. These Urhobo funeral practices are then to be approached in the light of biblical teachings on Christ's death as exemplary death. Understanding the biblical nature of filial duty of the living human beings to their deceased members is also important in

¹⁰³ Ibid., 20–29, 91.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 379–381.

¹⁰⁵ Hendrik M. Vroom, 'Is Not All Contextual Understanding of the Gospel Syncretism?' *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 3, no. 3 (November, 2009), 274–287: 278.

¹⁰⁶ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 378.

¹⁰⁷ Vroom, 'Is Not All Contextual Understanding of the Gospel Syncretism?' 280.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 286.

order to construct a liturgy or ritual that expresses the Christian meaning. Such is the ontological and theological critique which Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou suggested.¹⁰⁹ The concepts of *ɛvwɛ ehun*, *sakpregodi*, *ɛrhueṛhe* are discussed in detail in chapter seven.

1.4 System of Transliterating Urhobo Words and Phrases, Explanations of Urhobo Grammar and Tenses

All non-English common nouns in this thesis are italicised, their English meanings are given within the quotes in a parenthesis at first usage. The Urhobo words are further defined in the glossary (Appendix 2). The meanings of the names of Urhobo sub-cultural units like Idjerhe or Okpɛ and their sub-sub units are not given in parenthesis. The major sub-cultural units are simply rendered as Idjerhe-Urhobo, Okpɛ-Urhobo and the like in order to show that they all belong to the same Urhobo ethnic family despite their individual names. The transliteration of Urhobo words/concepts follows the pattern of English diction with respect to proper nouns and the word at the beginning of a sentence which start with an upper case. In Urhobo there is only one singular pronoun *o ye* ('he/she/'it'). I have translated this word as appropriate whether 'he/she' or 'it' wherever the respondents used it.

Urhobo is sub-divided into socio-cultural units for which scholars¹¹⁰ have used different terms like clan,¹¹¹ tribe,¹¹² polity,¹¹³ kingdom,¹¹⁴ *ekru-otor* ('lineage of the earth') or

¹⁰⁹ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 23–27.

¹¹⁰ The *ikpotɔ* were referred to as 'clans' by the British colonial administrators and by Obaro Ikime, a historian from the neighbouring Isoko ethnic group, but are now referred to as 'kingdoms,' by modern politicians in Urhobo Land. Other former usages include 'tribe' by R. E. Bradbury, 'polity' by Onigu Otite, *ekru-otor* ('lineage of the earth') or 'village group' by Perkins Foss, and *ɛkpotɔ* ('sub-culture') by Ekeh.

¹¹¹ Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri – Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884–1936* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1969), 2–29, 246; John Waddington Hubbard, *The Sobo of the Niger Delta: A Work Dealing with the History and Languages of the People Inhabiting the Sobo*

village group,¹¹⁵ and *ẹkpoto* (*ikpotọ* (plu), rendered as ‘subculture,’ ‘cultural unit’ or ‘sub-cultural unit’).¹¹⁶ The *ikpotọ* are discussed further in chapter four, section 4.3. This thesis uses the term *ẹkpoto/ikpotọ* (‘sub-culture(s)’) in agreement with Ekeh who explained that sub-culture better captures the ‘prehistoric’ and socio-cultural natures of the different Urhobo divisions than other terms.¹¹⁷ He clarified further that ‘polity’ or ‘kingdom’ is more political.¹¹⁸ Having adopted Ekeh’s terminology, ‘subculture’ as a matter of preference, it is important to note that the Urhobo subcultures are equally political and therefore, the political terms are as well relevant.¹¹⁹

The existence of different Urhobo sub-cultural units gives rise to varying expressions of some Urhobo words. Examples are *ẹshẹ/ẹphọ*, *agberen/erhuerhe*, and *esakpegodi/sakpregodi*.¹²⁰ Since this thesis focuses on Idjerhe-Urhobo, preference is given to its version where differences occur. In addition, and for the purpose of

(Urhobo) Division, Warri Province, Southern Nigeria, and the Geography of their Land (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1948), 9.

¹¹² R. E. Bradbury, ‘The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria: The Benin Kingdom; the Ishan; the Northern Edo; the Urhobo; and Isoko of the Niger Delta,’ in *Ethnographic Survey of Africa: West Africa, Part XIII*, ed. Daryll Forde, 18–171 (London: International African Institute, 1957), 130.

¹¹³ Onigu Otite, ed. *The Urhobo People*, viii.

¹¹⁴ Onigu O. Otite, ‘Autonomy and Dependence: the Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria,’ in *The Urhobo People*, 2nd Edition, ed. Onigu O. Otite (Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Limited, 2003); Onajite Igere Adjara and Andy Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems* (Ibadan: Texflow Limited, 1997), Joseph Obukowho Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family: The Urhobo Ruling Clan of Okpe Kingdom* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2005). Adjara, Omokri and Asagba however did not use the term ‘kingdom’ exclusively but interchangeably with the old word ‘clan.’

¹¹⁵ Foss, ‘An Introduction to the Urhobo,’ 23.

¹¹⁶ Peter P. Ekeh, ‘On the matter of Sub-cultural units and Kingdoms in Urhobo History and Culture,’ A Lecture at an Assembly of Urhobo Community, Abuja, Nigeria (n.p: n.p, Saturday, April 26, 2008), 1–21, available from http://www.waado.org/organizations/UPU/president_general_reception_abuja/lectures/subcultural_units_kingdoms_ekhe.htm, Internet, accessed 8 May 2011; Ekeh, ‘Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature and Outline of Urhobo History,’ 7 and 19–20.

¹¹⁷ Ekeh, ‘On the matter of Sub-cultural units and Kingdoms in Urhobo History and Culture,’ 1–3.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ See Appendix 3, Leadership Style Column.

¹²⁰ Abel Mac Diakparomre notes the same setting in his usage of *ivbri/ivwri/iphri* (‘Image of aggression’). See Abel Mac Diakparomre, ‘Artifacts as Social Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Traditional Urhobo Society of Nigeria’s Niger Delta,’ *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 35, no. 2 (Los Angeles: UCLA International Institute, 2009), 10.

uniformity, Urhobo words are italicised even when the quoted writer did not do so, except within direct quotes where the original form is preserved.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This thesis focuses on the funeral rite of the Idjerhe-Urhobo and aims at its contextualization from NBC's perspective. The ethnographic field research was carried out largely in Sapele and Idjerhe towns but the research findings are applicable to all Urhobo. The involvement of Sapele Township is as a result of it being the place where my church [Ebenezer Baptist Church] is located. However, it does not detract from the value of my findings on Idjerhe because Sapele is in the same vicinity as Idjerhe. Sapele and Idjerhe towns are only separated by the River Ethiope. Moreover, a good percentage of the people from Idjerhe live in Sapele and are members of my church, thus the research is of great relevance to them. Again drawing samples from Sapele does not detract from the validity of the research relevance for all Urhobo since members of other Urhobo sub-cultural units are comfortably settled in Sapele. For instance, fourteen participants, who represent eleven other Urhobo sub-cultural units outside Idjerhe in the ethnographic aspect of this research, are residents in Sapele. Obviously, Sapele can adequately represent the Urhobo ethnic group. More importantly, the participants consulted in Sapele were not consulted concerning Sapele but on their respective sub-cultures.

Despite its focus on the Urhobo, this research does not investigate the accuracy of the different claims by J.Egharevba, Onigu Otite, Peter P. Ekeh and other scholars about the historical origins of the Urhobo people. Neither does it engage in any way with the Urhobo' constant struggles with their ethnic neighbours for survival, superiority and

ownership of Warri,¹²¹ an enviable city because of its richness in crude oil minerals.¹²²

Apart from being sensitive, these issues have no direct bearings on the subject of this research.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This research has ten chapters. Apart from the introductory and concluding chapters, the eight chapters in between are subdivided into three parts. I, the Academic Framework comprising chapters two and three, the literature review and methodology respectively; II, the Ethnoreligious contexts of the Urhobo and the Baptists covering chapters four, five and six; and III, Fieldwork on Urhobo burial tradition subdivided into chapters seven, eight and nine.

Chapter one introduces the research problem, a religious/cultural dichotomy among Urhobo Baptists which resulted from lack of wholistic approach by the DSBC to Urhobo cultural context as a ‘web of significance.’¹²³ The chapter clarifies the major concepts in the research relating to Contextualization and Urhobo Baptist contexts. It also explains the method of transliterating and of presenting Urhobo words and

¹²¹ Onoawarie Edevbie, ‘Ownership of Precolonial Warri,’ in *History of The Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh (Lagos: Urhobo Historical Society, 2006), 266–296; Onoawarie Edevbie, ‘Who Owns Colonial and Post-Colonial Warri,’ in *History of The Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 297–354.

¹²² Onigu O. Otite, ‘A peep into the History of the Urhobo,’ in *The Urhobo People*, ed. Onigu O. Otite, 9–26 (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) Limited, 1982); Otite, ‘Autonomy and Dependence: the Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria,’ in *The Urhobo People*. 2nd Edition, ed. Onigu O. Otite (Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Limited, 2003); Peter P. Ekeh, ‘Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature and Outline of Urhobo History,’ in *History of the Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 1–41; Peter P. Ekeh, ‘A Profile of Urhobo Culture,’ in *Studies in Urhobo culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 1–50.

¹²³ The term ‘web of significance’ was coined by Max Weber (1864–1920, a German sociologist and political economist) but Clifford Geertz interpreted that web as culture. See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 5.

grammar. Limiting itself to ritual (funeral) studies, the chapter excludes the historio-political dimensions from the study and enumerates the reasons for the exclusion.

Part I–Academic Framework starts with literature review in chapter two. Having identified the global need of contextualization, this chapter locates the problem in Urhobo Land with particular reference to Urhobo ancestor veneration. It also pays attention to the way different Christian churches related to this cultural practice and the resultant effects in Urhobo Land. Chapter three focuses on the methodological approach, a qualitative ethnographic field research with the case study, and research sample methods. The chapter discusses all methodological details including the theoretical framework, the methods of data collection, analysis and synthesis, ethical considerations, and limitations of study.

Part II–Ethnoreligious Contexts has chapters 4–6. Chapter four, ‘Who are the Urhobo?’ examines the historical, cultural, linguistic, geographical, and climatic aspects of the Urhobo contexts and their effects on funeral tradition. Chapter five, ‘Rites of Passage among the Urhobo’ engages with the discussion of rites of passage in the anthropological field and within NBC and Urhobo Land. It focuses on Urhobo rites of circumcision and funeral and their implications for Urhobo culture of venerating ancestors. Chapter six, ‘Baptist Christianity among the Urhobo’ presents the historical survey of Baptist Christianity in Urhobo Land, its burial policy and theologies relating to funeral.

Part III–Fieldwork consists of chapters 7–9 which analyse the *uruemu r’orivwin r’eshio r’ihwo r’Urhobo* (‘traditional burial rites of Urhobo people’), using the Idjerhe-Urhobo

as case study. Chapter seven, 'Myth and Worldview,' discusses the Urhobo myth about the origin of death and the concepts of the universe, the human person and certain aspects of funeral rituals that are meant to promote harmony between the dead and the living. Chapter eight, 'Kinds of Deaths and Burials,' describes and analyses deaths and corresponding burial rites of people of different socio-political and economic categories and in different circumstances and explores the significant functions of traditional burial rites for the Urhobo. Chapter nine, 'Burial Roles and Practices,' rounds up the detailed examination of Urhobo burial tradition with a focus on the roles of children of the deceased and the extended family, and other practices for the interest of the deceased and the bereaved. It concludes with the enumeration of themes that run through Urhobo burial practices and which are generated through the field work.

Chapter ten concludes the research by identifying certain vital aspects of Urhobo funeral rites that could be considered for integration into the Baptist funeral processes. It also identifies Baptist historic contextual nature in support of the argument for contextual liturgy and analyses how the proposed liturgy in this thesis mediates between Baptist faith and Urhobo culture. Four appendixes to the research are (1) Table of Participants; (2) Glossary of Urhobo Words in the Research, Expressions of names and attributes of the Supreme Being and some Urhobo proverbs and sayings; (3) Table of Features of Urhobo *ikpotọ*; and (4) The text of the NBC Burial Policy.

In summary, this introductory chapter has recognised the sensitive nature of the problem of traditional culture and acquired faith and the necessity for an acceptable interrelationship. It has further shown that Urhobo funeral culture exists side by side with Baptist beliefs and that any attempt to suppress the former does not produce the

best of the latter. There is therefore a need for a practical and acceptable way of harmonisation. The next chapter is literature review, highlighting the universal and local nature of the problem of contextualization. It also reviews how different church officials in Urhobo Land have addressed the concept of ancestor veneration and the expressed opinions in favour and against contextualisation.

PART I–ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER TWO–LITERATURE REVIEW

This review takes cognisance of the universal nature of the problem of contextualization but locates it also within the context of Urhobo Land. It highlights the Urhobo reverence for their ancestors which is often expressed through funeral rites and discovers that their focus on the ancestors strengthens their family solidarity among the living and between the living and the dead. The Urhobo derive mutual benefit in the relationship as the living members pay homage to the dead, expecting blessings in return as claimed by Urhobo scholars¹²⁴ and this study respondents.¹²⁵ It is not surprising therefore that the Urhobo Baptists go back to perform traditional rites after church funeral service. The drive is linked to their saying that, *urie robi vughe eterhe r'oye ko kp̄or* ('a stream that forgets its source will get dried').¹²⁶ This Urhobo cultural practice however, is not agreeable to Baptist Conference in Urhobo Land, which has resulted in a religious/cultural dichotomy this study is evaluating.¹²⁷ While some scholars such as Erhueh, Daniel O. Riamela (1951–) and Erivwo¹²⁸ think that there is a need for contextualisation of funeral liturgy, the NBC/DSBC burial policies¹²⁹ and Baptist

¹²⁴ John Tokpabere Agberia, 'The *Adane-Okpe* Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 41, no. 3 (2006), 261–273: 270; Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family*, 6.

¹²⁵ For instance respondents 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 18, 22 and 23 emphasised that non performance of proper burial could cause evil for the children.

¹²⁶ Respondent 5.

¹²⁷ See 'The Background to the Study' in chapter one, section 1.1.

¹²⁸ See section 2.2. Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 292; Daniel Odafetite Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death: African Tradition and Christianity in Dialogue With Special Emphasis on the Urhobo Culture* (Ibadan: Claverianum Press, [c.] 1992), 59

¹²⁹ Delta State Baptist Conference, *Book of Reports and Minutes of the Third Annual Session held at First Baptist Church, Sapele, Delta State, February 14–17, 1996* (Warri: Ronke Printing Press, 1997), 34–35. *Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention* (Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nig.) Limited, 2005), 1–5. See also, 'Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention,' available from http://www.nigerianbaptist.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5&Itemid=20, Internet (24 September 2011), accessed, 10 August 2012.

church officials¹³⁰ view that Urhobo funeral practices are ‘pagan’ and irreconcilable with Christianization of Urhobo Land. While both views have merits and demerits, the main argument in this thesis is that critical aspects of Urhobo funeral process are transferable into Baptist funeral service.

2.1 The Global and Local Relevance of Contextualization

A team of scholars who are missionaries, anthropologists and theologians, Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno¹³¹ brought their experiences¹³¹ to bear in the way they exemplified the central thought of this research which is about Christian approach to non-Christian religions through critical contextualization. They gave priority to the discussion of ‘the meaning of life and death’ in their treatment of four¹³² ‘existential questions of everyday life’ that non-Christian religionists do ask. In asking how Christians should bury their dead, they suggested that missionaries should study the local Christians’ traditional rites and their own worldview,¹³³ and subject the beliefs and values to the scriptural test as already stated in chapter one, section 1.3.5. They were of the opinion that human beings ‘must give meaning to death’ in order ‘to make sense of’ life.¹³⁴ In relating death to life, Alan F. Segal (1945–2011), professor of Jewish Studies similarly emphasised that peoples’ concept of life after death affects how they treat their dead, and understanding one is necessary to appreciate the other.¹³⁵ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno recognised that Christian missionaries often discouraged ancestor worship among their audience, but ‘failed to substitute Christian rituals showing respect to parents,’ causing non-Christians

¹³⁰ Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, 24ff. Respondent 3, a Baptist official stated that ‘those things (which the Urhobo do in burials) were unacceptable to us Christians.’

¹³¹ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 9–10.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 93–94, 95f. The three other questions relate to overcoming misfortunes, unforeseen circumstances and life disorders or sin.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹³⁵ Alan F. Segal, ‘Afterlife,’ *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, A – C*, 1, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, 65–68 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006): 65.

to think that Christianity ‘ignores the ancestors and rebels against parents.’¹³⁶ In order to address this failure, they suggested that the Christians need a theology of godly dying¹³⁷ and of ancestors.¹³⁸ Part of the weakness of their thinking has been pointed out in chapter one, section 1.2. To add more here, their explanation that ‘folk religions’ do not explain where the dead have gone¹³⁹ is confusing as they also acknowledged in the same work, the non-Christians’ concepts of ancestors living in another world.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, instead of the mark of the difference that Hiebert and his colleagues set, that ‘formal religions explain where the dead have ultimately gone’ while ‘folk religions deal with the questions of death that confront the living,’¹⁴¹ one could rather state that Urhobo traditional religions explain both questions of death robustly, including where the dead have gone. These weaknesses notwithstanding, Hiebert and others have indicated that the problem and the need of contextualization are old¹⁴² and have been the concern of scholars universally.¹⁴³ Daniel Chi-Sung Chen also, has identified similar problem of ancestor veneration among the Chinese Christians in Taiwan,¹⁴⁴ and this research locates the discourse among the Urhobo Baptists vis-à-vis their funeral rites. Thus the problem is not limited to Urhobo Baptists but a universal phenomenon.

2.2 Urhobo Ancestor Veneration

‘Although he is now dead, he lives on in the hearts of many people today.’ With these words, Isaac E. Ekpon concluded the biography of Jove Ejovi Aganbi (1894–1957), one

¹³⁶ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénoú, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 122.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 129–130.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 118–119.

¹⁴⁴ Chen, ‘A Christian Response to Chinese Ancestor Practices in Taiwan: An Exercise in Contextualization,’ 1–4, 29ff, 35–36.

of the pioneer Urhobo Baptists whose memory among the Urhobo people is sustained by naming a church and two schools after him in Eku town in Agbon-Urhobo.¹⁴⁵ Urhobo scholars from different church traditions and academic disciplines are unanimous in asserting the importance that the Urhobo attach to their culture of Ancestor Veneration. From the Roman Catholic tradition are priests like Anthony O. Erhueh¹⁴⁶ and Riamela; and the laity such as Ekeh and Darah. The Protestant scholars include Erivwo and Michael Y. Nabofa (1943–)¹⁴⁷ from Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) (CON/AC), Charles E. Osume¹⁴⁸ from Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) and Daniel I. Ilega¹⁴⁹ of God’s Kingdom Society (GKS), a church founded by an Urhobo man and thus a member of African Independent Churches (AIC) as well. There are other scholars who studied Urhobo in their academic fields of socio-cultural and religious studies. In this category are John Tokpabere Agberia (1958–),¹⁵⁰ Gorette Emavefe Zoma (1959–),¹⁵¹ Abel Mac Diamkpore¹⁵² and Adogbo. The

¹⁴⁵ Isaac E. Ekpon, ‘Aganbi, Jove Ejovi, 1847 to 1957, Nigerian Baptist Convention, Nigeria,’ *Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB)*, available from http://www.dacb.org/stories/Nigeria/aganbi_jove.html, Internet, accessed 17 January 2012. Ekpon is currently a lecturer at Baptist Theological Seminary Eku and postgraduate student at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS), Ogbomoso.

¹⁴⁶ Erhueh’s major contribution is *Vatican II: Image of God in Man* (1987) which has been partly published as contributing articles to other Urhobo collections like Ekeh, ed. *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, 227–278.

¹⁴⁷ Erivwo is an Anglican minister but Nabofa is a church member. Nabofa, at the time of writing the works examined in this research was a professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan with specialisations in Psychology of African Traditional Religion. He is presently Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Niger Delta University, Bayelsa, Nigeria. It is important to note as well that Nabofa is Isoko but as Isoko and Urhobo are contiguous, he has studied both greatly.

¹⁴⁸ Charles E. Osume, *Okpe Philosophical Thought* (Lagos: Nehemiah Projects International, 2007). Osume is an Okpe-Urhobo and an ordained priest of ECWA.

¹⁴⁹ Daniel I. Ilega, *Gideon M. Urhobo and the God’s Kingdom Society in Nigeria* (Lagos: Meshico Enterprises Limited, 2003).

¹⁵⁰ Agberia, ‘The *Adane-Okpe* Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People,’ 261–273.

¹⁵¹ Gorette E. Zoma, *Ceremonies and Festivals: Marriage, Burial, Chieftaincy, and Annual Festivals in Uvwie-Urhobo, Nigeria* (Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 2003).

¹⁵² Diakparomre, ‘Artifacts as Social Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Traditional Urhobo Society of Nigeria’s Niger Delta,’ 1–18.

aforementioned are all Urhobo but there is also Foss,¹⁵³ an American Scholar, who researched extensively on Urhobo Statuary Arts.

Foss made it clear that the Urhobo revere their ancestors as heroes because of the ancestors' labour as original settlers. They also dedicate particular shrines to their spirits as 'warrior-founders.'¹⁵⁴ In this direction, Nabofa identified certain 'divine forces' that are worshipped along with the ancestors because of the belief that those spirits and forces assisted the ancestors of different Urhobo subcultures. Examples are *ovwuvwe* in Avwraaka; *ędjUvwię* in Uvwię; *ararepha*, *echekpá*, *ohon* and *ęrerivwin* in Evwreni; and *onidjo*, *ophio*, and *ugherighe* in Ughwerun.¹⁵⁵ As the entire subculture acknowledges and worships these gods, their gathering becomes a unifying factor as ancestors are.

The Urhobo communities look up to their ancestors and believe them to be pure and doing good, monitoring, judging, rewarding and punishing the living depending on their acts. The ancestors symbolise all the good of the family in the other world to which the living aspire and hope to join at death.¹⁵⁶ The Urhobo concept of ancestor is like the concept of a kingdom. Every Urhobo is connected to ancestral lineage and the life of an individual is relevant to the extent that he or she adheres to the family and the community's values which the ancestors originally gazetted. Among those values are love, truth, loyalty, adequate care of parents, respect for elders and especially for ancestors. The Urhobo believe in the value of proper burial as a means to install

¹⁵³ Foss, ed. *Where Gods and Mortals Meet*. Foss contributed nine out of its twenty articles on Urhobo culture.

¹⁵⁴ Perkins Foss, 'Huge Fearsome Beauty: Statuary for the Edjo,' in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet*, ed. Perkins W. Foss, 81–89: 86–87; Foss, 'An Introduction to the Urhobo,' 17.

¹⁵⁵ Micheal Y. Nabofa, 'A Survey of Urhobo Traditional Religion,' in *The Urhobo People*, ed. Onigu O. Otite, 220–231: 223–224; Appendix 3.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Y. Nabofa, 'Reincarnation: The Doctrine of Heredity and Hope in Urhobo Culture,' in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, 288 – 298: 288, 291.

departed parents into the rank of ancestors.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, Urhobo cultural identity includes communal living, dignified and symbolic burial rites, ancestral ties and veneration.

From the above, it is clear that ancestor veneration among the Urhobo is based on their views that ancestors are culture heroes, spiritual guardians and parents who never die. Beyond Urhobo Land, Heibert, Shaw and Tiénou identified five reasons which made the non-Christian religionists to venerate ancestors. They include the views of ancestors as one, founders of families; two, people who are ahead in experiencing death; three, people with powerful achievements; four, people with thought of the well-being of the family and five, intermediaries between God and humans.¹⁵⁸ Those dead who had no descendants to keep their memory or significant achievements or who had died prematurely do not become ancestors.¹⁵⁹ Consequently, the belief in ancestors provides people with the sense of history, hope, security and comfort.¹⁶⁰ Detailed discussion on ancestor veneration and worship is presented in Chapter five, section 5.5.

Erhueh, motivated by the Roman Catholic *Gaudium et Spes*,¹⁶¹ and Riamela, later influenced by Erhueh, both called for Roman Catholic dialogue with Urhobo culture. Riamela argued that Urhobo tradition should contribute to the development of Christian theology in Urhobo Land.¹⁶² In their advocacy for indigenisation, Erhueh and Riamela think that Urhobo attitude of reverence to their ancestors ‘could be apt tools for

¹⁵⁷ Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death*, 32f.

¹⁵⁸ Heibert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 120f.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 260. *Gaudium et Spes* (‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’) of Vatican II (1962–65) teaches on human dignity and calls for Roman Catholic Christians to dialogue with non-Christians.

¹⁶² Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death*, 57.

explaining the mystery of Christ, God's love for mankind and man's ultimate destiny.'¹⁶³ Erhueh observed that the 'European missionaries' assumption that Africans [which include Urhobo] do not offer sacrifices to Almighty God' is incorrect.¹⁶⁴ He thus argued that the concepts of *requerimiento* ('requirement')¹⁶⁵ and *tabula rasa* ('clean slate') demonstrated by the missionaries were responsible for the lack of indigenization in West Africa including Urhobo Land.¹⁶⁶

Riamela drew his views largely from the writing of Erhueh, but emphasised the Urhobo concept of heaven/spiritual abode of the ancestors, that is laid out along earthly family lineage. Riamela cited some Urhobo compound words which are associated with *erivwin* to clarify his point. Examples are *erivwin-r'uwevwi* (for 'a household'), *erivwin-r'orua* (for 'an extended family'), *erivwin-r'uduwo* (for 'a village quarter'), *erivwin-r'orere* (for 'a town/community') and *erivwin-r'ekuoto* (for the whole 'sub-cultural unit'). The above nomenclatures are corresponding spots, groves or shrines at which any particular *erivwin* is invoked and venerated, and these are considered sacred.¹⁶⁷ It is therefore obvious that the Urhobo conceive ancestral quarters to be patterned after the corresponding earthly family structure, the significance of which is explained in Chapter

¹⁶³ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 292; Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death*, 59.

¹⁶⁴ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 261.

¹⁶⁵ The *requerimiento* was a Spanish policy established in 1510 and abolished in 1556 (See S. James Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples in International Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36; Robert A. Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 91–93). However, it would appear that its official abolition did not remove the concept from the mindset of the missionaries. David Chidester (1952–) renders it as '*Requirement*,' a document which contains 'a set of terms and conditions for the entry of Christian message into the New World (America)' and certainly other parts of the world. Prepared by the Roman Catholic theologians and often read by the Spanish conquerors, it asserts the Roman political sovereignty and consequently Roman Catholic religious authority over the conquered lands. The conquerors were acting 'on behalf of the Spanish monarch,' claiming the link of legitimate authority to the Pope, St. Peter, and the Supreme God in that order. (See David Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History* (London: Penguin Group, 2000), 385–386).

¹⁶⁶ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 278–279; John S. Pobee, 'An African Perspective,' *Ecumenical Review* 37, no. 3 (July, 1985), 283–294: 290. In this article, Pobee traced the Roman Catholic openness to non-Christian cultures to the earlier concept of '*aggiornamento*,' by Pope John XXIII. *Aggiornamento* means 'the updating of the church's structures and functions in keeping with the signs of the time — political, social and doctrinal' (Ibid).

¹⁶⁷ Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death*, 10.

seven, section 7.2.5. Understanding the view of Erhueh and Riamela as coming from their Roman Catholic perspective which has the practice of prayers for departed souls, the irony is that they were also addressing their discussion as a problem within the Urhobo-Roman Catholic of their time. What could have been responsible for apparent inconsistency? A possible response is given in this chapter, section 2.3.1 below.

Nevertheless, the view of Ekeh and Riamela is not readily acceptable to the NBC because NBC as part of global Baptist denomination (Baptist World Alliance (BWA)) belongs to ‘a Reformation heritage’ which is known for ‘being sympathetic to renewal or restitutionist movements.’¹⁶⁸ Therefore, the NBC in relation to funeral rites emphasises breaking away with traditional cult and avoiding spiritual compromise. In any case, the issue that needs careful examination by any Christian group among the Urhobo is the perception of Urhobo cultural forms as traditional cult. For instance, Erhueh cited how the RCC separated children from the burial of their parents by forbidding the first son or daughter who is a Christian from participating in his or her traditional role in the parent’s funeral rites.¹⁶⁹ Could such a filial duty be regarded as a traditional cult?

This attitude appears to the Urhobo people as a way to evade filial responsibility under the guise of the new faith. One of my interview respondents confirmed this point that some eldest sons do exempt themselves from family traditions during burial because they are Christians; an action which does not receive favour from the family.¹⁷⁰ Two other respondents gave their personal examples in which their family eldest Christian

¹⁶⁸ Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study*, 713.

¹⁶⁹ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 294.

¹⁷⁰ Respondent 1.

son or daughter refused to attend their fathers' traditional burial.¹⁷¹ In reporting what normally happens after the burial of a chief, usually on the eighth day in Idjerhe, a respondent said,

The *Oguedion* ('the council of chiefs') will ask the senior son if he likes to take over the position of the father. If yes, a day will be scheduled for his instalment. If No, for lack of regard for it or inability to take over, or for reason of Christian faith which forbids, then the second born will be omitted and the third consulted if he will like to take over.¹⁷²

When asked why the second child is ignored, he explained that it would be to avoid a situation whereby the second child supplants the first.¹⁷³ One may however query further what if the third child, knowing this principle, does manoeuvre the process? Probable answer could be that he will draw the anger of the ancestors by so doing, which will serve as deterrent to any ill-motivated person. Another respondent narrated a 'mock drama' during the funeral ceremony of his father, arranged for him (as the first) and the second child to perform. In this case, the purpose was to promote the spirit of unity, agreement and positive compromise between the two brothers and to discourage them from antagonising each other. He explained,

There was a funny thing the family did. They told the second son to hold a cutlass and stand at the entrance of the room where the corpse is laid. He is to prevent the senior son (myself) from entering. It was expected that the senior son will pledge something valuable like a double barrel gun or clothes for the younger brother to allow him in. [...] I pledged clothes to my brother and he allowed me in.¹⁷⁴

These responses further underscored the mechanisms of Urhobo traditional funeral rites in emphasising the important role of an eldest child in relation to the rest children of the deceased and also to the extended family. More importantly, proper burial is understood as cultural duties of children to their parents, a wife to her husband, youths to their

¹⁷¹ Respondents 4 and 11.

¹⁷² Respondent 1.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Respondent 7.

elders and the living to their dead. If properly carried out, it is believed to foster family, community and cosmic cohesion. The question therefore is how does a church reject one aspect without endangering the other?

Like their Roman Catholic counterparts, Protestant theologians such as Erivwo, and Nabofa from Anglican Communion thought that Urhobo reference for ancestors could find a place in Christian faith. Erivwo's account shows that the 'discontinuance of ancestor worship' was among the factors that created 'tensions and reactions' in early Urhobo Anglican Christianity.¹⁷⁵ He observed that the Urhobo traditional concepts of immortality and the relationship between *erivwin* and *akpo* are of 'immense significance in Urhobo religion,'¹⁷⁶ and these concepts were 'a contributory factor to the people's reception of the Christian faith.'¹⁷⁷ Erivwo reported that the church attendance dropped noticeably when the Anglican Church would not tolerate the veneration¹⁷⁸ of ancestors which occupies a crucial part of Urhobo thinking.¹⁷⁹ Nabofa recognised the importance of the thought of reunion with ancestors to an Urhobo person, who is old and close to death. He described the situation as follow,

His major preoccupation [...] is an expectation of blissful reunion with the members of his own lineage in the great beyond, and a hope of continuous existence here on earth among his descendants; and as man of faith he does not see any contradiction in these two ways of conquering death.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 132.

¹⁷⁶ Samuel U. Erivwo, 'Urhobo Traditional Beliefs and Values,' in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 194–226: 226.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Erivwo uses the expression, 'worship.' Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 22–40.

¹⁷⁹ Samuel U. Erivwo, 'Urhobo Traditional Religion,' in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 152–193: 192.

¹⁸⁰ Nabofa, 'Reincarnation,' 297.

Osume recognised among the Okpe-Urhobo that the *irimin* ('ancestors') are above all other divinities except *Osolobrugue* ('Supreme Being.')¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, they have effect on their living descendants and punish those who commits *emrun ezaze* ('something strictly forbidden,' like adultery.) The power of *irimin* is however limited, not covering 'unrelated relatives' but *Osolobrugue* alone creates, owns and controls both the physical and the spiritual dimensions of the entire universe.¹⁸² The ancestors' limited jurisdiction confirms Riamela's earlier explanation on lineage-structured *erivwin* from the nuclear family to the sub-cultural unit level. In common with Erhueh, Riamela, and Erivwo, Osume objected to what he perceived as the undue emphasis on the areas of 'discontinuity' instead of 'continuity' between Christianity and African Traditional Religions and Cultures. He therefore highlighted the essential need for contextualization of the Christian message in Okpe-Urhobo Land.¹⁸³ On the issue of the continuity and discontinuity which Osume has raised, the problem one grapples in this research with is that Urhobo traditional religions emphasise continuity between the living and the dead in an active sense, such that there is mutual benefit. But Baptist faith does not encourage the living to look towards the dead for any benefit. How can therefore be any unruffled continuity between Baptist Christianity and Urhobo culture?

Considering how the dead benefits the living in Urhobo traditional religions, Agberia, Professor of Creative Arts at the University of Port Harcourt, who has written on the Okpes, mentioned the blessings of *emọ* ('children'), *otɔnvwen* ('long life'), and *igho* ('wealth') as the prerogatives of the ancestors and of *olokun* ('the goddess of the

¹⁸¹ Osume, *Okpe Philosophical Thought*, 81. In the account of Joseph O. Asagba, the expressions are *Omanohohwo* ('Supreme Being') and *Ediɔn* ('ancestors') (See Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family: The Urhobo Ruling Clan of Okpe Kingdom*, 6).

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 86–87.

¹⁸³ Osume, *Okpe Philosophical Thought*, 164–168.

sea.’)¹⁸⁴ Hence the ancestors and *olokun* are appeased once in three years through the *adane-Okpe* Masquerade festival.¹⁸⁵ In addition, Joseph O. Asagba, a prince and scholar from Okpe noted that the shrines of *adane-Okpe* like *elohor* (‘softness’), *edjokpa* (‘god/spirit of palm fruit’) and *ibuerime* (‘deities’) are concerned with peacefulness and high productivity in farming, hunting, fishing and palm fruit collection.¹⁸⁶ Asagba clarified further that the Okpe concept of *adene* is a junction of four roads that are named after the four Okpe ancestors.¹⁸⁷ Hence Agberia emphasised that, in the festival, the four princely Okpe ancestors are represented with masquerades and worshipped as providers of peace, progress, long life and prosperity.¹⁸⁸

During the ceremony, the Okpe traditional chief priest and the *Orodje* (‘king’)¹⁸⁹ lead the people to present their prayers, incantations,¹⁹⁰ petition for blessings¹⁹¹ and rituals to ward off evil spirits.¹⁹² The motif of mutual benefit is thus established. The living worships the dead and the dead in turn blesses the living. These principles are completely opposed to the Baptist tenets which do not support the worship of nor encourage the expectation of any reward from the dead.

¹⁸⁴ Agberia, ‘The *Adane-Okpe* Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People,’ 270.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁸⁶ Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family*, 6.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸⁸ Agberia, ‘The *Adane-Okpe* Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People,’ 263–64.

¹⁸⁹ Joseph O. Asagba traces the Urhobo word *Ovie* and the Okpe word *Orodje* to the same root-word *Ogie* (‘King’) from Edo-Benin which supports the view of Benin-origin for the Urhobo discussed in chapter four, section 4.1 (See Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family*, xxx; Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 16, 39).

¹⁹⁰ Agberia, ‘The *Adane-Okpe* Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People,’ 268.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 263.

Abel Mac Diakparomre (1952–) from Agbon-Urhobo and specialist in Visual Arts at Delta State University Abraka recognised another benefit from the ancestors. They foster social harmony and stability among their living descendants. Diakparomre stated that,

Through associated rites and rituals involving the use of masks and masked performances, ancestors and deities are called upon to intercede and arouse positive and benevolent forces that would foster peaceful and harmonious existence in the communities and ameliorate or, at least, delay negative pre-destinations.¹⁹³

In addition and contrary to the placement of ancestors over other divinities by Eriwo and Osumẹ, Diakparomre presented Urhobo cosmological structure with *Oghene* at the top, followed by *edjo*, before *esemo* and *iniemo* ('paternal and maternal' ancestors) and human beings at the bottom of the ladder. He however explained that *edjo*, as nature gods, not born by humans are hierarchically above *esemo* and *iniemo* who nonetheless 'often receive greater emphasis because of their proximate relationship with the living.'¹⁹⁴

In another study, Diakparomre examined six of the twenty-three Urhobo sub-cultural units, namely, the Agbon and Oghara from northern Urhobo; Eghwu and Ughievwen in the south; Evwreni and Ughele in the centre and identified the 'retribution' and the 'modification' mechanisms employed by the Urhobo to resolve their social conflicts.¹⁹⁵ The modification mechanism is connected with propitiation of the ancestors by the offender. He stated that conflicts that require the modification mechanism consist of deviant conduct such as 'incest, adultery and witchcraft,' which are considered to be an

¹⁹³ Abel Mac Diakparomre, 'Symbolism in Urhobo Masks and Mask Performances,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 45, no. 5 (The Author(s), 2010), 467–484: 479–480.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 470.

¹⁹⁵ Diakparomre, 'Artifacts as Social Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Traditional Urhobo Society of Nigeria's Niger Delta,' 1–18: 5, 12.

‘affront to the ancestors and clan gods.’¹⁹⁶ The Urhobo ancestors ‘are believed to be omnipresent and to help ‘police’ people against contravening the ‘laws’ of society.’¹⁹⁷ They also ‘have superintending authority over the living.’¹⁹⁸ In other words, they are guides, guardians and judges of morality of people but within their jurisdiction.¹⁹⁹ Erivwo made a similar point about the police-duty of the *esemo* (‘the ancestors’).²⁰⁰ In discharging their duties, Erivwo commented that the *esemo* are more active than the *edjo* (‘gods’) because while the latter may need prompting by their worshippers, the former does not.²⁰¹

Zoma, a woman Urhobo scholar, with paternal root in Oghara-Urhobo and maternal in Uvwie-Urhobo, focused her study on burial along with other ceremonies of the Uvwie-Urhobo, who ‘looked up to’ their ancestors ‘for protection.’²⁰² A common Urhobo approach to life that stands out in Zoma’s work is the performance of all ceremonies and festivals in stages. Zoma’s views correlate with other Urhobo writers particularly on the main goal of the two stages of the traditional burial, the first is interment and the second focuses mainly ‘on the activities designed to honour the spirit of the deceased.’²⁰³ Zoma highlighted mainly the aspect of *agberen* (the ‘second burial’ in Uvwie-Urhobo). *Agberen* is represented by a physical object, a ‘dome-like structure made up of woven basket, about five to six feet long and three to four feet wide [...] usually decorated with

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 5, 12.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 5

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 5.

²⁰⁰ Erivwo, ‘Urhobo Traditional Beliefs and Values,’ 195.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Zoma, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 37.

²⁰³ Ibid., 38.

several colourful traditional headties.²⁰⁴ According to Zoma, *agberen* is symbolically significant denoting the presence of ‘the spirit of the deceased,’ as the main celebrant,²⁰⁵ ritually invoked into this *agberen* at night and in the backyard of a house towards the end of the village.²⁰⁶ Another symbol of the presence of the deceased in the burial ceremony among the Uvwie is the flame lit by the senior son-in-law, which he must not allow to go out throughout the ceremony. Zoma explained the quality of an acceptable *evwe ehun* to be the sacrifice as a big and healthy female goat. If a sick and scruffy goat is offered to the ancestors, the spirit becomes unhappy and the sacrifice becomes unacceptable.²⁰⁷

From the Ughiewwen-Urhobo perspective, Darah mentioned that the Urhobo people dread four phenomena, of which *ughwu* (death, especially premature death) is the most dreadful. The remaining three are *obevwen* (‘want or wretchedness or poverty’), *orhan* (‘witchcraft’) and *egan* (‘childless’ or ‘barren’) in that order.²⁰⁸ Three of these four are the direct opposite of the blessings of *otonvwen* (‘long life’), *igho* (‘wealth’) and *emo* (‘children’) which Agberia mentioned earlier as desires among the Okpe-Urhobo.²⁰⁹ The fourth, the positive side of *orhan* (‘witchcraft’) which has not been accounted for by Agberia, could as well be good life which qualifies one to be an ancestor upon death. Darah addressed the four negative situations as ‘the four principal contradictions in the

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 41. ‘Headtie’ is ‘a strip of colourful fabric worn [or] tied around the head by women.’ (See *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed., s.v. ‘headtie’)

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 41–42. For Asagba’s explanation on *agberen*, see Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family*, 157, 163.

²⁰⁷ Zoma, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 40.

²⁰⁸ Godwin G. Darah, ‘The Political-Economic Factor in Urhobo Song-Poetry,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 469–492: 472.

²⁰⁹ Agberia, ‘The Adane-Okpe Massquerade Festival of the Okpe People,’ 270.

life of the Urhobo,' against which they pray constantly to the ancestors and the gods.²¹⁰ He elucidated further that though there may be political and economic factors responsible for unwanted experiences, the traditional Urhobo will rather explain problems in 'idealist and metaphysical terms,' like 'inauspicious destiny,' 'sorcery' or 'witchcraft,' 'malefic magic,' or 'the anger of an offended ancestor.'²¹¹

It is obvious that the works of Urhobo scholars thus examined bring out a number of outstanding factors. First, the Urhobo funeral rite is profoundly an ancestral rite, and strengthens kinship solidarity in the extended family and the community. The rite follows multiple phases and embraces socio-cultural and psycho-spiritual contexts. Second, there is continuity and mutual benefit between the living and the dead. The Urhobo appreciate their ancestors as heroes and venerate them. They expected in return from the ancestors to act as agents of law enforcement and social harmony and stability, and to mediate between their living descendants and *Oghene*, the giver of peace, progress, prosperity or to convey those blessings in their own right. Third, the Urhobo understand proper funeral rites as a prerequisite for becoming an ancestor. They believe it is a relational duty to the deceased. They therefore perform it to appreciate and demonstrate their love and loyalty to the deceased who had given them life and had sustained them all along. In the next discussion, I turn to consider the views of the scholars who advocated for the need of contextualization of Christian faith and liturgy among the Urhobo.

²¹⁰ Darah, 'The Political-Economic Factor in Urhobo Song-Poetry,' 472.

²¹¹ Ibid., 475.

2.3 Quest for Contextualization of Urhobo Christian Faith and Liturgy

2.3.1 Roman Catholic Christianity (RCC)

Erhueh noted the importance of understanding and incorporation of Urhobo socio-cultural or religious values, customs and dignity of the individual for an adequate contextualization of the Christian way of life.²¹² Drawing from the argument on *imago Dei*²¹³ in *Gaudium et Spes*, Erhueh suggested that ‘any customs and beliefs that promote human dignity and are in essence religious should find a welcome acceptance into the Christian religion as *praeparatio evangelica* (‘a preparation for the gospel’)²¹⁴ and lead to meaningful dialogue.²¹⁵ He however recognised the limit of the Urhobo traditional customs because he clearly stated that he had not given ‘an objective theological evaluation’ of the customs but only presented ‘a modest appraisal of the cultural situation as it exists in Urhoboland’ as prelude to his advocacy for ‘indigenization and Africanization.’²¹⁶

²¹² Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 259–260, 275, and 307.

²¹³ J. Richard Middleton presented the different interpretations of *Imago Dei* by scholars as the metaphysical sense (ranging ‘from human reason through conscience, immortality and spirituality to freedom and personhood’), the ‘dynamic, relational notion’ and the ‘royal interpretation’ (See J. Richard Middleton, ‘The Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context,’ *Christian Scholars Review*, 24, no.1 (1994), 8–25: 3 and 6). Steve W. Lemke described *imago Dei* and God’s noticeable reflections in ‘the personal, spiritual, relational, rational, volitional, moral, responsible, and emotional aspects of human life’ (See Steve W. Lemke, ‘The Intelligent Design of Humans: The Meaning of *Imago Dei* for Theological Anthropology,’ A Paper presented at the Southwest Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society Meeting in Houston, Texas, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 8, available from <http://www.nobts.edu/faculty/itor/lemkesw/personal/PersonhoodETSpaper.pdf>, Internet, accessed 7 October, 2011).

²¹⁴ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 302. The *praeparatio evangelica* concept was taught by Eusebius of Caesarea in about 313 CE to demonstrate the superiority of Christ and consequently Christianity over Greek religions and philosophies. It became one of the early church teachings that emphasised the existence of the seed of God’s knowledge in all human cultures, but argued that only with Christian interpretation could the seed grow into fruition (See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122; Aaron P. Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius’ Praeparatio evangelica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11). The equivalent concept is that of the *Logos Spermaticos* (‘Seeds of the Logos’) by Justin Matyr as the presence of the knowledge of the divine Logos in a ‘full and complete’ capacity with Christians but ‘deficient’ with the Greek and Roman philosophers (See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 92).

²¹⁵ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 304.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 272.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, especially the norms in articles 37–40 supports the argument for liturgical contextualization better by encouraging adaptation of Roman Catholic liturgy to the mother tongues, cultures and traditions of peoples of different territories ‘in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community.’²¹⁷ Ekeh, as a Roman Catholic faithful, related Urhobo funeral rites especially *erivwin* (‘spiritual abode’), to his understanding of purgatory and the communion of saints. He likened the Urhobo concept of the deceased’s ‘passage into the final and prestigious abode of rest’²¹⁸ to the RCC doctrine of the dead passing from Purgatory to Paradise. Moreover, the living relatives are responsible for either the execution of the proper and prescribed burial rituals or petitions in each of the process respectively.²¹⁹

A Roman Catholic priest in Sapele explained his Church’s doctrinal view that ‘nothing unclean can enter heaven.’ Therefore a person ‘who is not totally condemned to hell will need to pass through Purgatory, a place of temporary purification, before going to heaven.’²²⁰ The theme of petition for purification seems to be a major concern in the funeral liturgy approved in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Warri in 2009, because it gives prominence to the programmes of vigil and prayers for the deceased.²²¹ The Warri diocesan funeral liturgy extracts passages from the European Roman Catholics’ *Order of*

²¹⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (‘Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy’) solemnly promulgated by Pope Paul VI, Art. 37 (December 4, 1963), 8, available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, Internet, accessed 26 May 2011.

²¹⁸ Peter P. Ekeh, ‘Urhobo World View,’ in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal in Urhobo Art*, ed. Perkins Foss, 30–31: 30.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ See respondent 26 on Appendix 1, Table of Participants. For the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on Purgatory, see Geoffrey Chapman, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: A Cassell imprint, 1994), 235.

²²¹ *Rites of Christian Funeral* by Catholic Diocese of Warri (Warri: n. p., 2009), 5, 13–18. Bishop Richard Anthony Burke (1949–, coadjutor bishop in 1995, ordained bishop in 1996, an Irishman, but the Apostolic Administrator of the Roman Catholic diocese of Warri from 1997) articulates the Roman Catholic belief about their deceased members that ‘though separated from the living, the dead are still one with the community of believers on earth and benefit from their prayers and intercession.’ (Ibid., 4).

*Christian Funerals (OCF)*²²² but adds materials that are peculiar to the Warri locality.²²³

Paul J. Sheppy as a liturgist summarised the OCF as ‘prayers for the dead and those who mourn.’²²⁴ There is therefore a similarity in structure between OCF and the Warri diocesan funeral liturgy.²²⁵ The OCF follows the thought of liturgical contextualization expressed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of Vatican II that,

The rite for the burial of the dead should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death, and should correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions found in various regions. This holds good also for the liturgical color to be used.²²⁶

Three main purposes of the Roman Catholic Funeral Liturgy are stated in the OCF. One is to worship ‘God, the author of life and the hope of the just,’²²⁷ Another is to intercede ‘on behalf of the deceased because of [the Roman Catholic] confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life.’²²⁸ It seems the intercession for the deceased is expanded to include the company of the dead²²⁹ which is similar to the Urhobo understanding as demonstrated during the *erhuẹrhe*. The third purpose is to console the bereaved ‘with the comforting word of God and the sacrament of the eucharist.’²³⁰ Consequently, in the OCF, ministers are advised to consider the factors of the deceased’s life and the circumstances of death in conjunction with ‘the spiritual and psychological needs’ of his or her family and friends in planning for funeral rites.²³¹ On

²²² The OCF is the Roman Catholic revised English version of the *Ordo Exsequiarum* in use in England and Wales since 1987 and in Scotland since 1988 (See *Order of Christian Funerals* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991), v).

²²³ *Rites of Christian Funeral*, 2, 5.

²²⁴ Paul J. Sheppy *Death Liturgy and Ritual Volume II: A Commentary on Liturgical Texts* (Aldershot Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 10–11.

²²⁵ Compare *Order of Christian Funerals*, 50 and 59 with *Rites of Christian Funeral*, 16–19.

²²⁶ Vatican II *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (‘Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy’) solemnly promulgated by Pope Paul VI, Art. 81 (December 4, 1963), 14.

²²⁷ *Order of Christian Funerals*, 3.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. The intercession for the deceased prominently features throughout the book (*Ibid.*, 27–28, 36–37, 44–45, 48–50, and so on).

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

the liturgical elements, ‘the choice and use of signs and symbols [that] are in accord with the culture of the people’²³² are encouraged.

Therefore, there are two related issues in the treatment of the dead by the Urhobo community and the RCC which are honour for the dead (ancestors) by the former, and petition for the dead by the latter. Both concepts underline the capability of the living to influence the state of the dead though the Urhobo emphasise in addition the power of the ancestors in affecting the lives of their living descendants. Therefore, in view of this position of the Roman Catholic and the arguments of Erhueh and Riamela that the Roman Catholic Church did not dialogue with Urhobo culture, one could observe a narrow similarity but wide difference between the Urhobo and the Roman Catholic positions. They both presented a view that the dead could be assisted. Nevertheless, while the Roman Catholic doctrines allow prayers for the departed faithful, the Urhobo practice included prayer to ancestors and expectation of blessings from them. Hence, it will be difficult for the Roman Catholic Church to accept Urhobo funeral rite as it is.

2.3.2 World Council of Churches (WCC) and Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN)

At the assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1968, the representatives from Africa and Asia reported their frustrating experiences with imported worship style and liturgy. Part of the report states,

Because of their own experiences, some who have been at this Assembly have been able to express the frustrations of Asians and Africans under forms and worship imported from abroad, and some have been able to express the question raised by the secularised parts of the world: why worship at all?²³³

²³² Ibid., 7, 12.

²³³ Norman Goodall, ed. ‘Worship,’ *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches Uppsala July 4–20, 1968*, 74–85 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968): 78.

Deliberating on this aspect of the report, the WCC recognised the strong influence of Jewish culture on Christian liturgy and the respective cultural influences as Christianity ‘moved into different cultures and ages,’ in order ‘to reach men in the depth of their being.’²³⁴ Therefore, the Council recommended ‘the constant re-expression of the Church’s liturgy and language in the culture in which it lives,’²³⁵ and that ‘Christian worship should be related to the cultures of the world [and] help a person to be truly Christian and truly a man of his own culture.’²³⁶

Meanwhile, Nabofa’s account shows that the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) had addressed the same issue of contextualization of liturgy ten years earlier, at its eleventh annual meeting held in Calabar, Nigeria between 9 and 17 April, 1958²³⁷ and also before Vatican II which was only announced in January 1959 by Pope John XXIII.²³⁸ The CCN advised the different regions to examine their local customs, beliefs and music with a view to enrich the ‘Christian life and worship.’²³⁹

2.3.3 Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) (CON/AC)

The rise of the Anglican Adam Preaching Society (AAPS) with its contextualized forms of worship and evangelism within the CON/AC in Isoko and Urhobo Lands around the 1960s²⁴⁰ seemed to meet the recommendation of the CCN and the WCC for the Isoko

²³⁴ Ibid., 80.

²³⁵ Ibid., 79.

²³⁶ Ibid., 80–81.

²³⁷ Michael Y. Nabofa, *Evolution of the Urhobo Holy Bible and Some Christian Liturgical Books* (Ibadadan: End-Time Publishing House Ltd., 1997), 36, 64.

²³⁸ ‘The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Dedicated to ‘The Immaculate,’’ 2, available from <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/v1.html>, Internet, accessed, 8 October 2011.

²³⁹ Nabofa, *Evolution of the Urhobo Holy Bible*, 36–37.

²⁴⁰ S. G. Azuwo Onibere, ‘Adam Cornelius Igbudu: An Assessment of his evangelisation efforts among the Isoko and Urhobo Peoples of South-Western Nigeria, 1914–1981,’ *Asia Journal of Theology*, 4 no. 1 (1990): 74–90.

and the Urhobo. The AAPS, led by Adam Cornelius Igbudu (1914–1981) laid emphasis on miracles and the use of indigenous music to enrich its worship programmes. It is unlikely that AAPS knew about CCN resolutions as Adam C. Igbudu was not in official Anglican leadership. S. G. Azuwo Onibere observed that before the rise of AAPS, the CON/AC liturgy as the Urhobo perceived it, was ‘cold, formal and rigid,’ unexciting and lacking potency,²⁴¹ but that of AAPS was full of ‘life and dynamism.’²⁴² Consequently, the society’s lively and participatory style of worship brought revival to CON/AC ministries among the Isoko and Urhobo. The CON/AC leaders in Isoko and Urhobo Lands however criticized the group as ‘non-Anglican’²⁴³ and its method as ‘unorthodox.’²⁴⁴

These leaders therefore opposed the AAPS until they discovered that Isoko and Urhobo Anglican Church members were more attracted to the AAPS worship style. Such realisation made the Anglican Church leaders give the AAPS the freedom to operate as a society within Isoko and Urhobo Anglicans from 1963 till the present time (2012). The initial opposition to AAPS by the Anglican hierarchy in Isoko and Urhobo Lands, by leaders who were themselves Urhobo and Isoko people constitute a challenge to the position of Erhueh, Riamela and Erivwo about the Euro-American missionaries as major cause of non-contextualization in Africa. Therefore it is inadequate to hold the Euro-American missionaries solely responsible for the non-contextualization of Christian faith in Urhobo Land, as the records here considered indicate that there are contributing factors from the Urhobo church leaders as well.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 76.

²⁴² Ibid., 78.

²⁴³ Ibid., 76.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 85.

Nonetheless, within Urhobo Anglican Church, there were clergy and lay leaders who have contributed towards liturgical contextualization. Tracing the development of CON/AC liturgical books in Urhobo Land, Nabofa gave a *résumé* in May 1979, following the launching of *Baibol Ofuafon na* ('The Holy Bible' in Urhobo) which took place on 29 April 1978.²⁴⁵ Top on the list was the *Obeke*, 'the first Urhobo Primer, [containing] stories from both the Old and New Testaments.'²⁴⁶ It was written by Thomas Emedo, an Anglican Church teacher (or agent) from Orogun-Urhobo. The second work was an Urhobo Book of Common Prayer. Compiled before 1920, it was a translation by Emedo from sections like the orders of the morning and evening services, and hymns of the 1662 Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Nabofa stated that this translation did not contain Psalms, or the orders of important services like burial, marriage, baptism, confirmation and Holy Communion.²⁴⁷ The third literature was also a translation of another Urhobo Book of Common Prayer in 1940 by Bishop Agori Iwe (1906–1979).²⁴⁸ This translation contained the Anglican thirty-nine Articles of Faith, the Psalms, seventy-two hymns and essential services, except ordination and consecration.²⁴⁹ Enajero Arawore added to the Urhobo Anglican hymns in 1958, 1978 and 1981.²⁵⁰

The works of Thomas Emedo and Agori Iwe are not readily available to the general Urhobo public; I could not get any copy from the Anglican ministers at the time of this study. However an Urhobo liturgical book first published in 1939 is available at the

²⁴⁵ Nabofa, *Evolution of the Urhobo Holy Bible and Some Christian Liturgical Books*, republished as Nabofa, 'The Urhobo Bible,' *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 26, nos. 1–2 (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press Ltd., 1995): 14–21. Also, Nabofa, 'Evolution of the Urhobo Bible and Some (Urhobo) Christian Liturgical Books,' in *History of The Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 216–249: 216–249.

²⁴⁶ Nabofa, *Evolution of the Urhobo Holy Bible and Some Christian Liturgical Books*, 16–17, 35.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 and 35.

²⁴⁸ Agori-Iwe was the first Urhobo person to be ordained an Anglican priest in 1937 and bishop in 1961.

²⁴⁹ Nabofa, *Evolution of the Urhobo Holy Bible and Some Christian Liturgical Books*, 36.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 36–38.

British Library, London as *Ọbẹ r'ẹrhovbo r'ihwo ejobi kugbe ine vbẹherẹ r'Urhobo* ('Urhobo Prayer and Hymn book').²⁵¹ This publication contained prayers against *ọdjadja r'uwhu ri bẹde* ('suffering in eternal death'/'torment of death') for the living,²⁵² for safe *r'ivhiẹrohọ r'evrẹnuwhu na, ra ruẹ arhọ ro vb'oba-a* ('passage from death unto eternal life') for the deceased,²⁵³ and *uvboroma vb'oma vẹnwẹ* ('peace of the body and the spirit/mind') that has no end for both the living and the deceased.²⁵⁴ The use of *arhọ vb'oba-a* ('eternal life') instead of *erivwi* ('spiritual abode') distinguishes the Urhobo Christian usage from the non Christian. The translators' reasons for avoiding the words *orivwi*²⁵⁵ and *erivwi* are not immediately clear, but it is likely because *erivwi* ('spiritual abode') points to the land of the dead with strong indication that the spirits of the dead are supernaturally powerful and actively involved with the living and could determine their fate. Contrariwise, the Christian understanding is that though the dead are in a new form of existence and could be a cloud of witness around the living, they do not have power to control the living but rather waiting on God for their own judgement.

The current liturgical book in use among Urhobo Anglicans is the 2007 edition of the Book of Common Prayer by the CON/AC. The two sample programmes of funeral services that took place at an Anglican Church in Sapele in 2010, that I examined correspond to the Rites 'I' and 'II' for unconfirmed and confirmed members respectively in the Book of Common Prayer of the CON/AC. These Anglican funeral liturgies share with those of the Roman Catholics, the feature of petitions for mercy, hope for Paradise,

²⁵¹ *Ọbẹ r'ẹrhovbo r'ihwo ejobi kugbe ine vbẹherẹ r'Urhobo (Urhobo Prayer and Hymn book)* (London: SPCK, 1939, reprinted 1950, reprinted with Revised Hymnal 1954), 67–71.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁵⁵ A Dictionary of Urhobo Language has three suggested words for 'the dead.' They are *ihwoighwuru*, *ihwoighweghwu* and *ihwoerivwin*. See Ayemenokpe E. Osubele, *A Dictionary of Urhobo Language* (Odogbolu: Doves Publishing Company, 2001, reprinted 2009), 41, 67.

and peace in the spiritual abode for the deceased. Benediction is also said for the dead.²⁵⁶

2.3.4 Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC)/Delta State Baptist Conference (DSBC)

There is however a world of doctrinal difference between the views of the RCC, CON/AC and the NBC. The NBC believe primarily in ministering support and comfort to the bereaved and seem to worry less about helping the deceased.²⁵⁷ Therefore NBC does not believe that prayer or any other ritual can affect the fate of the dead²⁵⁸ but that his or her 'life continues in another world in a status consigned to him by God based on the life he (or she) lived on earth.'²⁵⁹ Oyibo expresses it thus,

Whatever is done in burial ceremonies does not contribute to the eternal destiny of the dead and that whatever is done in burial ceremonies is not done to the dead since the dead is ignorant of what we are doing and cannot acknowledge and appreciate our efforts.²⁶⁰

The details of Baptist doctrine relating to the spiritual condition of the dead are discussed in chapter six, section 6.3 but concerning honour for the dead, the NBC recently reiterated its stand. Through the report of the Convention Ministerial Board to the ninety-eighth Convention-In-Session held at Ogbomoso from 7 to 12 May 2011, the Convention warned its members against hero worship. The report states:

On the naming of the churches after living or dead individuals, the decision was left for the church concerned to take the appropriate nomenclature that suits her. However it should be noted that the Convention frowns at hero worship and individuals claiming the ownership of our churches.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church according to the use of The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) together with the Psalms of David printed out as they are to be sung or said in Churches and the form and manner of ordaining of Bishops, Priests and Deacons* (Dongshan: Nanjing Amity Printing Co. Ltd., 2007), 238, 240–241, 254.

²⁵⁷ Paul Sheppy differentiates Roman Catholic from Protestant funeral rites thus, while the former 'paid careful attention to the deceased and to prayers for the dead,' the latter 'looked more to the solace of those who mourn' (See Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual Volume II*, 177).

²⁵⁸ A DSBC leader once reacted sharply against the usual obituary statement like 'may his or her gentle soul rest in peace' (See Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, 79.)

²⁵⁹ Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, 18, 22, 111.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁶¹ *Addendum to Ministerial Board Report* (Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nig.) Limited, 2011), 4.

This decision was a follow up to the Board's recommendation during the previous annual session of the Convention in 2010 at Abuja which was to discourage the naming of Baptist churches and Associations after departed members. Before this time, Nigerian Baptists used to give the names of their late outstanding leaders to churches and Associations to immortalise them. Examples are:

Rev. Aganbi Memorial Baptist Church, Eku, Rev. Howell Memorial Baptist Church, Eku, Okotie-Eboh Memorial Baptist Church, Sapele, Caroline Obire Memorial Baptist Church, Effurun, Baba-Ido Memorial Baptist Church, Okwagbe Water Side, Esther Onovakpiri Memorial Baptist Church, Eku, Okobibi Memorial Baptist Church, Oviri, Rev. Omatsola Memorial Baptist Church, Sapele (this has been changed to Heavenly-way Baptist Church, Sapele), Ekeh Memorial Baptist Church, Okpara Inland, Rev. Eghaghe Memorial Baptist Church, Isiokolo.²⁶²

The Heavenly-way Baptist Church in Sapele was formerly named 'Rev. Omatsola Memorial Baptist Church' in memory of Aghoghin Omatsola (1867–1969) who led the formation of the Baptist church in Sapele in 1917 out of the CON/AC. The church decided for the change in December 2009 and started with the new name in 2010. The pastor of the church explained that certain members of the Church requested for the change because although Omatsola founded many Baptist churches in Edo and Delta States, they did not want to identify with the polygamous life style of Omatsola which led to his suspension by the Convention in 1941. He narrated further that the name was therefore not helping the church in the area. Also that 'since the change, the tension within the church is calm and the church is growing.'²⁶³ However, the Convention Board is well disposed to the naming of multi-purpose, educational or guest house buildings in memory of past Convention leaders with outstanding performance.²⁶⁴ From the above, it

²⁶² Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, 105.

²⁶³ Interview with John Ofomukoro, the Pastor of Heavenly-way Baptist Church, Sapele, 26 April 2012.

²⁶⁴ *Nigerian Baptist Convention 97th Annual Convention Session: Book of Reports*, held at the Convention Ground, Kubwa, Abuja, FCT., (17–22 April 2010), 84. Another argument expressed against naming churches after individuals is that the individuals (if living) or their family (if dead) could lay claim to the church in the future (Ibid., 89).

is thus clear that the NBC differs in approach and understanding from the RCC, CON/AC and Urhobo traditional community with regards to the treatment of the dead. It is also obvious that the Urhobo burial tradition is closer to the Roman Catholic funeral doctrines than the Baptist.

Meanwhile, when Urhobo experience the death of their loved ones, whether Catholics or Baptists, they react in the same traditional way. As a pastor among the Urhobo, one therefore needs to understand the cultural dimensions of how they grieve in order to adequately meet their psycho-spiritual needs. The *Gaudium et Spes* highlights this principle of relevance by stating that,

In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith.²⁶⁵

Likewise, the NBC leaders and scholars such as Osadalor Imasogie, Solomon A. Ishola and B. U. Enyioha, emphasised the same principle of contextualized pastoral ministry among the Nigerian Baptists; an in-depth discussion of their contributions on the rites of passage is presented in chapter five.

Be that as it may, until the present time, there is yet to be any recognisable effort towards liturgical contextualization among the Urhobo Baptists. Instead, the Baptist churches of the DSBC mostly rely on the Minister's Manuals prepared by Franklin M. Segler,²⁶⁶ James Randolph Hobbs²⁶⁷ and Osadalor Imasogie.²⁶⁸ At most, the officiating

²⁶⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* ('Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,' promulgated by Pope Paul VI, Art. 62 (December 7, 1965), 35, available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, Internet, accessed 26 May 2011.

²⁶⁶ Franklin M. Segler, *The Broadman Minister's Manual* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 1968), 42–78.

²⁶⁷ James Randolph Hobbs, *The Pastor's Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), 11–108.

ministers may present the programme in the vernacular when it becomes a necessity in any congregation. Segler is a Baptist professor of pastoral ministry based in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas while Hobbs is a pastor at First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama. Both Segler and Hobbs are Baptist ministers in the USA, and their Manuals are deficient for the Urhobo Baptists.

Within the Nigerian Baptist Convention, A. E. Ogundele and Sola Aworinde have produced contextualized Minister's Manuals for the Yorùbá Baptists²⁶⁹ but Imasogie's Manual though emphasised the importance of contextualized liturgy, did not focus on any ethnic group because it is prepared for the general use of the NBC.²⁷⁰ Imasogie's manual has two options of funeral liturgical orders from which the ministers are free to choose. The liturgies are not to be administered on the basis of membership or confirmation status, as is the case with the CON/AC orders.²⁷¹ Imasogie explained that the introduction of the Funeral Wake and Outing (also known as Thanksgiving) services into funerals 'is a Nigerian Christian phenomenon.'²⁷² He pointed to other practices that are associated with the traditional burial rites in Nigeria (including the Urhobo Land) such as the wearing of black clothes, shaving of head and mourning for a specified

²⁶⁸ Osadolor Imasogie, *Minister's Manual* (Ibadan: Publications Department Nigerian Baptist Convention, 2005), 87–94.

²⁶⁹ A. E. Ogundele, *Iwe Iranlowo Awon Oniwaasu* (Manual Aid for Pastors). (Ibadan: Nigerian Baptist Press, 1976, reprinted, 1996); Sola Aworinde, *The Minister's Manual* (Lagos: The Agape Publications, 1999).

²⁷⁰ Imasogie, *Minister's Manual*, 90–94.

²⁷¹ In this Manual, Imasogie presents sample orders of funeral programme to be chosen from. He did not write out in details how the words 'are to be sung or said' as the Roman Catholic and Anglican orders do (Compare Imasogie, *Minister's Manual*, 88–91 with The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), *The Book of Common Prayer*, 235–254 in which all that will be said or sung either by the priest or the people are well written out.). In the order of the Lord's Supper, Imasogie demonstrates the Baptist attitude of freedom and choice with expressions like 'the Pastor may say' or 'add.' which suggests that what is written is a guide and not a law (See Imasogie, *Minister's Manual*, 54–55). Yet in the liturgy of the solemnisation of holy matrimony, Imasogie becomes as comprehensive as the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans. The details are still limited to the solemnisation itself, not the entire programme of which four samples are given (Ibid., 59–85).

²⁷² Ibid., 90–92.

period of time. He observed that the lack of interest in those practices could be easily interpreted as ‘lack of love and concern for the departed.’²⁷³ The bereaved experiences some sense of satisfaction and fulfilment when the cultural requirements are properly followed. They feel that they have adequately demonstrated ‘their sorrow [over] the death of their loved one’ and are therefore free to continue with their normal life activities.²⁷⁴ Imasogie therefore advised ‘the [Baptist] church’ to be sensitive to the members’ emotional and cultural needs at burials.²⁷⁵ In his opinion, such sensitivity can be achieved through an adequately contextualized funeral liturgy which ought to address the following two questions. What are ‘the socio-religious and psychological needs that a particular traditional practice’ satisfies? And how can the needs ‘be met in the Christian way without violating the core of the Christian faith?’²⁷⁶

In spite of the slow pace of contextualization among the Urhobo Baptists, it is important to note the efforts of Jove Ejovi Aganbi, one of the Urhobo Baptist pioneers and presently, the Baptist Soul Winning Band (also known as the Baptist Gospel Group). Like Thomas Emedo and Agori Iwe of Anglican Church, Aganbi translated St. John’s Gospel into Urhobo between 1936 and 1940.²⁷⁷ He translated hymns as well.²⁷⁸ A search through this Hymn compilation also revealed that Jovi Ejovi Aganbi, probably for similar reasons mentioned in section 2.3.3 above, avoided words like *orivwi* and *erivwi* which are associated with pre-Christian Urhobo, except as title of songs under *orivwiesho* (‘funeral’). Instead, Aganbi used words like *arho* (‘life’), *emakashe* (‘angels’), *oboyi* (‘yonder’), *odjuvwu* (‘heaven’), *ushi* (‘grave,’

²⁷³ Ibid., 92.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 93.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 92–93.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Nabofa, *Evolution of the Urhobo Holy Bible*, 18.

²⁷⁸ John E. Amromare and S. A. Onofekohwo, *Pathfinders of Baptist Mission work in Delta State* (Lagos: Functional Publishing Company, 2011), 42.

‘tomb’ or ‘sepulchre’), *vwerhe* (‘to sleep,’ describing death as falling asleep).²⁷⁹ In addition, the Baptist Soul Winning Band is Baptist equivalent of Anglican AAPS. The two groups claimed the same foundation in Adam Igbudu and operate similar patterns of administration and programmes. Outside the Baptists, Anglicans and Roman Catholics, the Urhobo Indigenous Churches and Pentecostal churches are positive towards Urhobo culture, seriously contextualizing their ministries, making them relevant to Urhobo socio-cultural and psycho-spiritual needs. Consequently, they enjoy large membership among the Urhobo and attract members from the churches that are anti-Urhobo culture. A leading example is Daniel Dikeji Miyerijesu²⁸⁰ who had formed and now leads the God’s Grace Christian Ministry (GGCM). It is important to note that the acceptance of Urhobo culture by these other church denominations does not amount to acceptance of Urhobo traditional religions and gods. For instance, Miyerijesu is known for organising crusades and burning Urhobo *juju* (‘charms’) and idols.²⁸¹

2.4 Argument against Contextualization of Urhobo Funeral Practice

Gideon O. Oyibo is a strong critic of contextualization of Urhobo Baptist funeral practice. He thought that the church, especially Urhobo Baptist church has compromised too much with traditional and ‘paganic’ culture of ancestor worship and worship of the dead²⁸² and therefore should break away. Not only did he condemn Urhobo burial but also the way it is being done by Baptists churches presently (2012) with programmes

²⁷⁹ Jovi Ejovi Aganbi, *Urhobo Hymnal* (Sapele: Agbomeji Endurance Press, n. d), hymn numbers 152–175, 187–282, and 285–290.

²⁸⁰ Rev. Daniel Dikeji Miyerijesu founded the God’s Grace Ministry out of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) in 1993. He changed his own surname from *Mimeyerayin* (‘I am just saluting them’) to *Miyerijesu* (‘I am saluting Jesus’). The former connotes the circumstance of a relationship that is not cordial either at the family or community level.

²⁸¹ This writer however does not agree with indiscriminate burning of materials that could be preserved as Urhobo cultural artefacts.

²⁸² Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, 24.

like songs service, funeral service, outing thanksgiving service and memorial service.²⁸³ He however suggested that the outing thanksgiving be changed to family dedication service.²⁸⁴ He also argued against the usefulness of memorial churches, naming churches after the dead, a community, a quarter or a road as unscriptural and makes the church a property of the dead and the inheritance of his or her living relatives. He expatiated further that the act is a demonstration that the church exists to honour and celebrate the glory of the dead and to subject the church to the influence of the spirit of the dead.²⁸⁵ Therefore, he commended the Convention for stopping the practice and further recommended the change of names of all Baptist churches that have been named after the dead.²⁸⁶

Understanding death to be resulted from 'God's judgment against man's rebellion,'²⁸⁷ Oyibo laid much emphasis on Mathew 8: 22 and understood Jesus to mean that it is those who are spiritually dead that should be concerned with the burial of the dead.²⁸⁸ He stated that the living or the church has no responsibility to the dead than the disposal (interment) of its corpse, as the most important factor in burial and not any of the associated ceremonies,²⁸⁹ because burial is a mourning not celebration.²⁹⁰ He argued that the corpse is unclean and should not be brought to the church sanctuary for any form of worship with the dead.²⁹¹ Instead, he recommended that funeral services be restricted to family compounds,²⁹² claiming that the Priests Prophets, Jesus and the Apostles did not

²⁸³ Ibid., 49–60.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 59–60, 127–128.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 105–107.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 108, 122.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 111.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 114, 129–131, 133.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 118.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 113, 115

²⁹² Ibid., 119, 123.

play any role in burial.²⁹³ Other reason he gave is that the dead is not conscious of the activities of the living on its behalf and therefore can neither reward nor punish.²⁹⁴ He presented an example of a solemn burial in which a person bereaved of his mother simply met the mother's family on the day the mother died and arranged for the burial the next day. He stated,

The next day, the Church people and other family members available were present for a brief service or solemn assembly at the family compound. After the interment, there was a provision of light refreshment which a good number of people did not wait for.²⁹⁵

He did not however give detail information about the deceased, her age and role in the family, the church and the community when alive. Neither did he clarify on items in the service at home or at the grave site. It would have been necessary to ascertain whether the program amounted to a ceremony or not and whether it was for the living or the dead or both. Are the people also spiritually dead to have performed that burial no matter how simple it was?

It is important to note that Oyibo's emphasis on care, honour and appreciation of people when they are alive instead of waiting for their death and burial²⁹⁶ coupled with his advocacy for simple burials with prudent expenses are commendable. It is proper for Baptist ministers to encourage prudent spending among the people they oversee. Nevertheless, the total condemnation of Urhobo culture of burial is rather to the extreme. In addition, the sample of simple burial which Oyibo narrated may not fit in certain situations especially if the deceased was a prominent person in the family, the church or the community when alive.

²⁹³ Ibid., 113.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 26.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 125–126.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 120.

Moreover, the emphasis on a Christian corpse as impure is inadequate. To think that the church or the living has no responsibility to the dead is also faulty, and to regard people who perform burial as spiritually dead can be counter productive. I do not think that bringing the corpse of a Christian to the church sanctuary or conducting burial service in the church could cause any desecration because ‘whether we live or die we belong to the Lord.’²⁹⁷ There are people who look forward to a good church burial and a similar motivation is noticed among the Igbo Christians by Okorochoa.²⁹⁸ Although corpse impurity was emphasised in the OT and God forbade the priests and nazirites to care for their dead relatives, Christians ought to dispose of their fellow dead bodies ‘as reverently and efficiently as possible.’²⁹⁹ Even though they are dead, they were formerly our family and church members and we need to treat their dead bodies with respect. At least we treat their properties with respect, then, how much more their bodies in which they formerly nurtured us and cared for us? Again, what do we think of the bodies of believers which were formerly the temples of the Holy Spirit and which will be raised at Christ’s second coming? Christ has changed the curse and the course of death,³⁰⁰ therefore the sting of death is gone.

The practice of marking the grave cannot also be justifiably condemned because of its cultural and anthropological importance whereby the living descendants use the grave of their ancestors as evidences of ownership of plots of land especially in Africa? Francesca Stavrakopoulou³⁰¹ pointed out that among the people of West Asia in Bible

²⁹⁷ Romans 14: 8.

²⁹⁸ Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa*, 264.

²⁹⁹ Geoffrey Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* (London: SPCK, 1977), 2.

³⁰⁰ Lehman Strauss, *Life After Death: The Great and Glorious Miracle Promised by Our Creator* (Westchester, IL: Good News Publishers, 1961), 15, 20; 1Timothy 6: 14, 16; 2Timothy 1: 10; Hebrew 2: 14; 1Corinthians 15: 22; John 11: 25; Philippians 3: 20, 21; Romans 8: 11.

³⁰¹ Francesca Stavrakopoulou teaches Hebrew Bible in the University of Exeter and researches on ancient Israelite and Judahite religions and biblical portrayals of the religious past (See Francesca

times, the burial and especially the grave site performed the function of ‘territoriality.’³⁰² By territoriality, she meant the use of burial plots as instruments of ‘propriety or appropriative “links to land” within many cultures,’ thereby making the dead able to ‘mark, and thus claim, land for the living.’³⁰³ Similarly among the Urhobo, the land on which family ancestors are buried is called *udu* (‘family land’), and burial sites still remain a legitimate and strong prove of family ownership of lands in all of Urhobo Land until the present time (2012).³⁰⁴

Another important point to note is that one burial account or all the burial accounts together in the Bible do not give a whole picture of Jewish burial custom which Oyibo regarded as biblical burial because the main interest of the Bible writers was not to give instruction on burials. And even if they do, Jewish burial developed from Jewish culture and could not stand as Christian burial. It is also obvious that ‘the old customs tend to survive’ with new movements but ‘given a new rationale.’³⁰⁵ Hence, it cannot be ruled out that Christian burial practice has been influenced by both Jewish and non-Jewish cultures which it had come in contact with. But certainly, Christian interpretations have been offered for such practices. In like manner, certain Urhobo cultural practices during funerals could be redirected with new Baptist understanding rather than total discouragement without a relevant substitute.

Furthermore, church leaders need to exercise careful caution in allowing personal experiences to become a standard on issues where people are capable of different

Stavrakopoulou and John Barton, eds., *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: T & T Clark International, 2012), xv).

³⁰² Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestral Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010), 3–4.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Chief Magistrate Daves Emakunu, Idjerhe, 9 July 2012.

³⁰⁵ Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, 1.

experiences. It might be relevant at this point to consider the background in which Oyibo formed his opinion. During his mother's burial in 1997, he was not happy with what he regarded as too much expense, and too beautiful casket. He became more disturbed when the preacher at that burial contrary to his expectation commended the children for the beautiful casket. Since then, Oyibo decided otherwise to preach against extravagant burials among Christians.³⁰⁶ Writing about a similar situation on Christianity in China, Daniel Chen observed that the historical opposition of Christianity to Chinese culture of ancestor veneration reveals more of the opinions of the missionaries and Popes involved than it reveals of Christianity itself.³⁰⁷ Finally, Oyibo's view of burial without ceremony cannot be acceptable to the Urhobo who estimate the value of a burial by the associated ceremonies and to simply inter a corpse without adequate ceremonies amount to burying a person 'like a fowl.'³⁰⁸ It has also been noticed that ritualizing death makes people to cope with their grief.³⁰⁹

From this review, the following observations are noted. One, because the Euro-American missionaries who introduced different Christian denominations and denominational practices to the Urhobo did not welcome reference to the Urhobo ancestors, their consequent Christian theology and liturgy had little or no relevance for Urhobo culture and values. Two, there are Urhobo scholars among the RCC and CON/AC who recognised the problem and are giving thought to contextualization of Christian faith in Urhobo Land. They have taken some aspects of Urhobo funeral practices into consideration. Three, there are however other Urhobo especially in the

³⁰⁶ Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, vii–viii.

³⁰⁷ Chen, 'A Christian Response to Chinese Ancestor Practices in Taiwan, 195.

³⁰⁸ This expression was used by people of Abraka-Urhobo at the occasion of the burial of a woman who died in childbirth. Members of the church involved felt that because it was a sad kind of death, the burial should not include any elaborate ceremony but the family members of the deceased refused and said, 'since she has children, we cannot just bury her like a fowl.'

³⁰⁹ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 116.

leadership of DSBC who think that Urhobo funeral rites could not have a place in a Baptist church.³¹⁰ The dilemma that Urhobo Baptists encounter during funeral rites stems from such approach.

The two positions above have their strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, those who argued for contextualization could win the approval of Urhobo people but run the risk of being perceived as encouraging pre-Christian practices of sacrifice to ancestors. On the other hand those who argued against contextualization believe they are defending biblical Christianity but the effect of their action produces ‘split-level Christianity’ among Urhobo Baptists. Therefore, this study charts a middle course to strike a good balance between cultural sensitivity to Urhobo tradition and faithfulness to DSBC church tradition. Hence the research argues for a contextual Urhobo Baptist funeral liturgy that will meet the needs of Urhobo Baptists who seek to be faithful both to their culture on the one hand and the beliefs of DSBC/NBC on the other hand. It takes into consideration both the valued traditions of the Urhobo and the Baptist tenets to construct a contextualized Urhobo Baptist funeral liturgy. With this integration there will be three principal effects, namely, (1) to save the Urhobo Baptists the double cost of having to satisfy the church and the society separately; (2) to satisfy the DSBC concern of discouraging members from dual faith practices during funerals; and (3) to gain more converts from among the Urhobo who have hitherto refused to embrace Baptist faith because of its non-welcoming attitude to Urhobo funeral culture. The discussion in the next chapter identifies the theoretical framework relevant to this research and presents the methodological approach.

³¹⁰ The NBC/DSBC Burial Policy that instigates this research was enforced in Urhobo Land in 1997 and in the whole Convention in 2005. Certain aspects of Oyibo’s views may not be official, but has influence as leader of DSBC.

CHAPTER THREE–METHODOLOGY

This chapter clarifies the methodological approach. Starting with the research problem and questions; it presents the rationale for the choice of the qualitative field research method. It also highlights the academic justification for the case study and the research sample. The theoretical framework consists of the functional theory of Bronislaw K. Malinowski, the symbolic and theological anthropological theories of Victor W. Turner (1920–1983) and Paul P. J. Sheppy, and the contemporaneous and contextualized hermeneutical theory of Osadolor O. Imasogie. I added insights from my pastoral experiences and the study of Urhobo language. The chapter further discusses the methods of data collection, analysis and synthesis, ethical considerations, and limitations of study.

3.1 Introduction and Overview

This study addresses the religious/cultural dichotomy that exists among the Urhobo Baptists during funeral rites, using the Idjerhe-Urhobo as a case study. After performing the funeral rites in the church, members of this group generally return to family compounds to perform other Urhobo rites without informing the church. In addition, some families have experienced division during the burials of Baptist members because of disagreements which normally ensue between the Baptist church and the family of the deceased or between the Christians and non-Christian members of the same family. A better understanding of the Urhobo funerary culture and a positive approach towards contextualisation is vital if the NBC is to bridge the existing gap and foster the development of a Baptist funerary practice that is authentically Urhobo. In order to discuss the problem, the study uses a qualitative field research approach to examine two key-questions which border on Christian faith and its relevance to cultural identity. First,

Could an Urhobo Baptist be faithful to his or her Baptist faith and respect cultural identity as it relates to funeral? Second, Could DSBC be faithful to its Baptist heritage and at the same time be relevant within the funeral rites of Urhobo society?

3.2 Rationale for Qualitative Field Research

I chose a field research approach because it has been recognised as the most relevant method for culture-based studies which enhances direct contact with the study group in their traditional setting and involves extended field work, participant observations and the consciousness of their world-view.³¹¹ Martin D. Stringer, an ethnographer of worship observed that the processes of participant observation and open-ended semi-structured interview uncover three phases of knowledge about any study group and relates the phases together. The three phases centre on the action of the study group and the researcher's disposition to it, and are expressed in terms of what the group says it is doing, what it is really doing and the researcher's disposition about what the group says it is doing in relation to what it is actually doing. Or put in another way, what the group ought to do, what it says it is doing and what it is actually doing.³¹²

According to Atkinson and Hammersley, controversy surrounds the definitions of ethnography among scholars. Nevertheless some of its characteristic features include a strong emphasis on the exploration of social phenomena rather than the testing of hypotheses, the tendency to work with unstructured data, the detailed investigation of a small case, and the analysis of data that entails interpretations of human activities,

³¹¹Martin D. Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship* (Birmingham: The University of Birmingham Press, 1999), 42ff.

³¹²Ibid., 50.

gathered through verbal narratives.³¹³ The process of this thesis matches the above description. In addition, Bronislaw Malinowski has demonstrated the effectiveness of ethnographic method in the study of the interrelatedness of the social, cultural and psychological aspects of a society.³¹⁴

Both quantitative and qualitative methods could potentially apply in this research, but the qualitative method was chosen because of its capability to research deeper into a narrow case, use of empirical method, rather than speculation³¹⁵ or other ‘experimental conditions created by the researcher’³¹⁶ to investigate people’s behaviour, use of relatively informal conversations, oral tradition, narratives and the unstructured approach to collect data³¹⁷ that remains largely unknown due to lack of written materials, and emphasis on the ‘the value – laden nature of inquiry.’³¹⁸ I did not choose to adopt a quantitative approach because it focuses on ‘the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes.’³¹⁹

It is the search for the value systems that lie beneath the oral process of narratives and process of ritual action that made a qualitative approach the most appropriate for my study. This in turn, therefore, requires a closer focus, and so, this thesis is focused on

³¹³ Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, ‘Ethnography and Participant Observation,’ in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 248–261 (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 248.

³¹⁴ Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, xvi, 11.

³¹⁵ Hammersley, ‘Ethnography and Participant Observation,’ 250.

³¹⁶ Martyn Hammersley, *Reading Ethnographic Research: A Critical Guide* (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1990), 1.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹⁸ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, ‘Introduction: Entering the Field of Qualitative Research,’ in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 8. Denzin is Professor of Communications, Sociology and Humanities, at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and Lincoln is Professor of Higher Education and Educational Administration at Texas A & M University, USA.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

one of the twenty-three Urhobo sub-cultural units, namely the Idjerhe-Urhobo. Most of the findings with other sub-cultural units are used to cross-check how the Idjerhe was similar to or differ from other Urhobo sub-cultural units with regards to funeral rites. I met with my respondents in the setting of their homes and we discussed informally in a free atmosphere without any closed system of questioning. Though there are issues of reflexivity and power dynamism to be discussed later, I believe that the relaxed environment of the interviews promoted in my respondents authentic expressions out of which I have drawn both their meanings which they directly communicated and other meanings that I deduced from their narratives.

Qualitative research is also appropriate for this research because it cuts across disciplines. The multidisciplinary nature of qualitative research made Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln describe it in generic terms as ‘multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter.’³²⁰ By this, they intend the study of phenomena and people in their original state in order to derive the people’s own interpretation of their actions.³²¹ In the study of funeral rituals, more than one discipline is involved, including psychology, pastoral counselling, theology, philosophy, anthropology, and cultural studies. This is because in funerals, the emotional, the spiritual and the ideological aspects of peoples’ lives are all affected. For instance, Arnold van Gennep (1873–1975) studied death as part of rites of passage in the field of anthropology. Victor Turner studied it from a socio-cultural perspective, while Paul P. J. Sheppy approached it as a pastoral theologian and anthropologist.³²² This study relates

³²⁰ Denzin and Lincoln, ‘Introduction: Entering the Field of Qualitative Research,’ 3.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual Volume I*, 43–60.

to mission studies as well, which cuts across disciplines of theology and behavioural sciences.³²³

The qualitative approach fits this research as its agenda is similar to what Denzin and Lincoln identified of the qualitative ethnographic researcher. He/she studies ‘things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.’³²⁴ Ethnographers collect and study empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview and observational, historical, interactional and visual texts.³²⁵ The ethnographer is a *bricoleur* (‘jack of all trades’), who combines many methods and decides which is to be used at a particular time and context.³²⁶

3.3 Rationale for the Case Study

I have chosen the Idjerhe-Urhobo for the case study because of their tenacious funeral tradition. For instance, an Idjerhe chief said, while another Urhobo subculture may permit a break between the days for burial, the people in Idjerhe are expected to observe the days at one stretch.³²⁷ He added that the Idjerhe do not exempt any in-law from performing the full rites of in-laws greeting whereas another subculture may lessen the burden for internal in-laws.³²⁸ A respondent also reported that there were more conflicts between Baptist congregations and families from Idjerhe than from other Urhobo sub-

³²³ Dean S. Gilliland, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, ed. Dean S. Gilliland, 1–5: 3.

³²⁴ Denzin and Lincoln, ‘Introduction: Entering the Field of Qualitative Research,’ 3.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid., 3–4.

³²⁷ Respondent 1.

³²⁸ Ibid.

cultural units, when it comes to funeral rites.³²⁹ Recalling what happened at Idjerhe in 1992, this respondent summarised his church's opinion of the Idjerhe people thus, 'we know that the people always want to keep their tradition as far as burial is concerned.'³³⁰

Recounting the experience, he said:

At about 3a.m, the relations of the deceased came to say it was already their time to perform their family rites, so, we should give them chance. This was their usual practice that time. They allow the church to do the burial to a point and then take over to perform their family rites. When they are through with the family rites, they allow the church to conclude and do the interment.³³¹

This respondent explained further that all the pleas of the church officials to the family members on that occasion were refused. In the end, 'the church members left the corpse and the family members were happy to take over.'³³² He however clarified part of the circumstances as follows,

At a time like that, the widow is usually kept far away from the scene. She was in the house with other people. So, she has no power. The children also were very small. They cannot speak for themselves. It was the relations who were actually not Christians that took over. The only sister who supposed to intervene had no strong will to defend the practices of the church. So, they had their way.³³³

These explanations demonstrate the important role of family in Urhobo burial and the insistence by Ijerhe people that their traditional rites be observed even during Christian burials. Another recent incident of disagreement between Iderhe people and a church over burial which occurred on 23 February 2012 has already been narrated in chapter one, section 1.1. In situations where a kind of confrontations described above are prevented, the common phenomenon is for the family to allow the church members to

³²⁹ Respondent 14.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

complete the church rites and go home before the family performs her own rites later without officially involving the church.

3.4 The Research Sample

The research participants mapped on the table of participants in Appendix 1 include twenty-six religious leaders from Christian pastors, priests, elders and chiefs of forty years of age and above across thirteen Urhobo sub-cultural units. They also include a pastor from a neighbouring ethnic community whose Christian ministry is among the Urhobo. The participants are drawn from both Urhobo traditional religions and Christianity in Sapele and the Idjerhe towns.³³⁴ With their ages and involvements, they are not novices but are regarded as custodians of traditions and faith in their respective religions. I sought their consent before enlisting them. The interviews took approximately forty-five to sixty minutes per session at a time convenient to each of them. I had more than one session with some respondents. There is a concentration on Idjerhe-Urhobo and Urhobo Baptists. Six of the respondents belong to Idjerhe-Urhobo including a palace chief with whom alone I had three sessions of interviews of a total of four hours twenty minutes. The statistics of the participants in percentage to the nearest whole number is as follow, Christians 88, Urhobo traditional religionists 12, Baptists 54, Idjerhe-Urhobo 23, men 81, women 19, ages below sixty years 23, and ages above sixty years 77. Apart from those on the table of participants, there are other persons interviewed when their personality, office or knowledge were found relevant to the study. For this category, their names and dates of interview are cited in the notes and also listed under interviews as part of sources consulted.

³³⁴ Sapele is the largest industrialised and cosmopolitan town in Okpe-Urhobo but not the traditional headquarters of the Okpe sub-cultural unit. Idjerhe town on the other hand, is the headquarters of the Idjerhe sub-cultural unit. The two sub-cultural units share common boundaries through River Ethiope. (See Agberia, 'The Adane-Okpe Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People,' 262).

3.5 Theoretical Framework

The subject of this research is interdisciplinary in nature as a rite of passage, an anthropological, liturgical, ritual and contextualisation study. It therefore brought me into dialogue with various scholars such as Arnold van Gennep, Bronislaw K. Malinowski, Paul P. J. Shepp, Victor W. Turner, Clifford J. Geertz (1926–2006) and Osadolor O. Imasogie.

Van Gennep was a Belgian Anthropologist with a ‘taxonomic’ methodology. He was the first to articulate the theory of ‘Rites of Passage’ for his anthropological study in 1907³³⁵ as ceremonies that mark a person’s progress from one stage of life to another. He included stages such as pregnancy and childbirth, birth and childhood, initiation, betrothal and marriage, funerals and seasonal changes³³⁶. Van Gennep studied the funeral rites of the Bestileos of Madagascar³³⁷ among others and identified the three-phase pattern of separation, transition and incorporation that characterised every ceremony or rites of passage. Van Gennep noted that these three phases are not always equally developed by all the people in every ceremony, and that one phase may be prominent in one ceremony than the other. He further maintained that the rite of transition is prominent in funerals. In some cases, the transition period for the bereaved and the deceased are the same and it is the mourning period for the bereaved.³³⁸

³³⁵ Barbara G. Myerhoff, Linda A. Camino and Edith Turner, ‘Rites of Passage,’ in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 12, ed. Mircea Eliade, 380–386: 382; Barbara G. Myerhoff, Linda A. Camino and Edith Turner, ‘Rites of Passage,’ in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 11, 2nd ed. Lindsay Jones, 7795–7801: 7797.

³³⁶ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), xxiii, 27.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, viii, 146–165.

The strength of van Gennep lies in breaking the new ground of knowledge and giving prominence to the tradition of non theoretical, descriptive and narrative anthropological study. His contribution of ‘rites of passage’ inspired subsequent scholars for ‘additional penetrating insights’ like Malinowski’s analysis of the ‘function of reciprocity,’³³⁹

Malinowski carried out his ethnographic field study between 1914 and 1920 among the Trobriand islanders (The modern State of Papua New Guinea).³⁴⁰ Malinowski approached his study with methods of ‘biocultural (or psychological) functionalism,’³⁴¹ a deep immersion into the Trobrianders’ culture, and participant observation³⁴² to challenge the then prevailing evolutionist and historicist views of the Australian aborigines as savages, mysterious, cannibals, curious, bizarre and exotic, performing magic, tattooing their bodies and practicing promiscuous sex, violent, and irrational or emotional. He aimed ‘to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life and thereby his vision of his world.’³⁴³ Influenced by the Cambridge School of Anthropology, Malinowski preferred a separation between results based on ‘direct observation and of native statements and interpretations’ and ‘the inferences of the author, based on his common sense and psychological insight.’³⁴⁴ Among other things, Malinowski studied the Trobrianders’ *kula* (‘economic exchange system) and *yoba* (‘sacred ritual’) performed with charms and drums to send *baloma* (‘the spirits of ancestor’) to a sacred

³³⁹ Ibid., x. Malinowski analysed the economic exchange system of fish and vegetables between the coastal and inland villages and concluded that, ‘Each community has, therefore a weapon for the enforcement of its rights: reciprocity.’ He stated further that, ‘As a rule, two communities rely upon each other in forms of trading and other mutual services as well. Thus every chain of reciprocity is made the more binding by being part and parcel of whole system of mutualities’ (Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1926), 23). He also identified reciprocity in the ritual payment by the deceased kinsmen on the third day of his death to a widow who adequately mourned her husband (Ibid., 34).

³⁴⁰ Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, xix, 16.

³⁴¹ Eric Porch, Kimberley Neutzling and Jessica Edwards, ‘Anthropological Theories: Functionalism’ (University of Alabama, Department of Anthropology, 2009), 1, available from <http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Functionalism>, Internet, accessed 8 July 2012.

³⁴² Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, xvi–xvii, 7–8, 13f, 18f, 22, 33ff.

³⁴³ Ibid., 25.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 3, 15.

after world. He discovered that the Trobriand islanders actually lived in families and were as sophisticated and rational human beings just like the Europeans, in spite of their different physical appearance. He then concluded his research with a fresh perspective that people were the same all over the world; everyone is driven by the same passion, hunger, fear, vanity, and sex. All human cultures therefore have a purpose; as such, every custom is set to serve a function in the society and rituals are evolved to satisfy our basic needs.³⁴⁵

The strength of Malinowski's work lies in his cutting-edge use of participant observation. However, his thought that cultures of 'native communities' will disappear within a generation or two³⁴⁶ proves inadequate as they persist almost over ninety years after his research, though as underlay. In addition, strong criticism emerged in 1967 at the publication of his personal diary and the discovery of his use of racist words. Raymond Firth described the diary as a 'revelation of a darker side of the relation of an anthropologist to his human material'³⁴⁷ or a 'revealing egocentric obsessional document.'³⁴⁸ Malinowski was thus seen as prejudiced just as were the Victorian anthropologists he had condemned. His supporters nonetheless excused him on the ground that he was temperamental and often angry with all sorts of people including Australian administrators, his colleagues and himself. For instance, Raymond Firth stated that 'Malinowski often used equally violent language about other groups and

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 9–11. Porch, Neutzling and Edwards, 'Anthropological Theories: Functionalism,' 1, 7.

³⁴⁶ Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, xvi.

³⁴⁷ Raymond Firth, Introduction to Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, xi–xix (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967, reissued 1989), xvi.

³⁴⁸ Firth, Second Introduction, 1988 to Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, xxi–xxx: xxi. In this second introduction, Firth listed both positive and negative reactions to the diary including scholars like himself and Clifford Geertz, who have changed their minds more positively and realised the contribution of this diary to the anthropological corpus within the twenty years period. The current thought of the importance of anthropologist's reflexivity on his works is a relevant example. Firth thought that the diary over the time from being anthropological footnote to 'a more central place in the literature of anthropological reflection' (Ibid., xxxi).

persons, Europeans or Americans [...] to get his irritations out of his system.’³⁴⁹ Others concluded that despite his intent and purpose, Malinowski, like every human being is imprisoned with his time and culture with all its prejudices.³⁵⁰ Malinowski was also criticised for generalising from a single case. Robert Redfield (1897–1958), an American anthropologist thought that the critique of generalisation ‘loses much of its force if the assumption may be admitted that there are a common human nature and a universal culture pattern.’³⁵¹ Redfield stated further that, ‘We may learn much of all societies from a single society, of all men from a few men, if unusual insight is combined with patient and prolonged study of what other students have written about other societies.’³⁵² Meyer Fortes (1906–1983), a Professor of social anthropology at the University of Cambridge, who had personal contacts with Malinowski and was renowned for ‘the monographic method,’³⁵³ concluded that, ‘There are uniformities and common patterns in the customs and institutions of mankind; and if we want to understand them, we must take into account the common intellectual and emotional dispositions of mankind.’³⁵⁴ But on the other hand and in deliberating upon a statement of a Tale friend that, ‘Now that we have done proper ritual our grief is soothed,’ Fortes confessed the defect of ‘generalized ethnographic descriptions’ that ‘they do not enable us to see how ritual or belief is actually used by men and women to regulate their lives.’³⁵⁵ Fortes underscored that Malinowski navigated this defect with his emphasis on ritual as ‘a mode of action as well as a system of belief, a sociological phenomenon as

³⁴⁹ Firth, Introduction to Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, xvi.

³⁵⁰ Examples are words like ‘surfeit of native.’ See Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 6.

³⁵¹ Robert Redfield, ‘Introduction,’ to Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1954), 10.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ ‘The monographic method’ is an approach in which ‘the analysis of particular material could lead to insights of a broader relevance’ (See Ray Abrahams, ‘Professor Meyer Fortes, 1906–83,’ *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 53, no. 4 (1983), 80–82: 81).

³⁵⁴ Meyer Fortes, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion* (New York: Octagon Books, 1959, reprinted 1981), 8.

³⁵⁵ Fortes, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*, 25.

well as a personal experience.³⁵⁶ For only such approach could bring out ‘the living meaning of ritual and belief.’³⁵⁷

Sheppy is a British Baptist Theologian, who specialises in Liturgical Studies and a member of the English Language Liturgical Consultation. He took further van Gennep’s work on the rites of passage but employed a ‘theological anthropological’ methodology. To Sheppy, ‘human’s death should be explained by reference to Jesus death, descent to the dead and resurrection.’ He believed in the cosmic significance of Christ’s death and supports its ‘representational’ view against ‘substitutional’ view. The former considers the Greek preposition *hyper* (‘on behalf of’) and holds that ‘Christ death makes sense of and gives meaning and hope to mine.’ Whereas the latter interprets *anti* (‘in place of’) maintains that ‘Christ dies in my place so that I do not have to die.’³⁵⁸

The substitutional view is critiqued on the ground of morality and adequacy. How can the guiltless die for the guilty? And how can one person’s death release many from death? The response lies in the ‘awfulness of sin,’ and ‘perfectness of (Christ’s) sacrifice’ respectively.³⁵⁹ The criticism against the representational view is that since the holders of this view ‘may argue that the cross is completed in itself, the work has been done regardless of human response,’ it may cause human beings to shirk their responsibility and avoid accountability. The representationist response to this critique is that Christ made acceptable and representative response to God on behalf of all people.³⁶⁰ Sheppy however drew attention to Dorothee Sölle’s argument in the opposite

³⁵⁶ Ibid; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, With an Introduction by Robert Redfield (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1948), 24–25.

³⁵⁷ Fortes, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*, 25.

³⁵⁸ Paul J. Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual Volume I: A Commentary on Liturgical Texts* (Aldershot Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 74–75.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 75.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

direction ‘that it is substitutional view that eradicates human response while the representational demands it.’³⁶¹

Turner was a British cultural anthropologist and made further contributions to the development on rites of passage. Turner employed Malinowski’s models of participant observation and ritual functionalism to study the rituals of Ndembu people of Zambia, taking ‘inside view.’³⁶² Ndembu society was matrilineal and lacks strong political unity but ‘the ritual system compensates to some extent for the limited range of effective political control and for the instability of kinship and filial ties to which political value is attached.’³⁶³ Turner’s work, along with that of Clifford Geertz and others, are often referred to as symbolic and interpretive anthropology. Clifford Geertz argued that ‘culture is best studied as a publicly available symbolic system,’ and held that religious rituals involve the symbolic fusion of ‘ethos and worldview.’³⁶⁴ Geertz introduced the concept of ‘thick description’ and argued that only ‘the spelling out of the context’ can bring out the true meaning of the action in each case.³⁶⁵

In his work on theological methodology, Osadolor Imasogie argued that ‘context influences one’s perception of spiritual reality’ and that different worldviews will ‘affect the resulting theology.’³⁶⁶ Therefore, according to him, ‘Christianity is an incarnational religion,’ and has always been ‘informed by the contextual milieu of its target

³⁶¹ Ibid., 75–77.

³⁶² Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 10–11.

³⁶³ Victor W. Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1957), 291.

³⁶⁴ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 113, 127.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 5, 9–10.

³⁶⁶ Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 67. Although Imasogie has been in NBC ministry of preaching and teaching since 1951, he embarked on the study of ‘Theological Methodology’ between 1977 and 1978 at the Divinity School of Vanderbilt University in Nashville Tennessee, USA to concretize his theological thought.

audience.’³⁶⁷ Imasogie thus critiqued the nineteenth century missionaries from Southern Baptist Convention, USA as ‘quasi-scientific,’ and apologetic in approach, thereby overlooking the African cultural and religious worldview.³⁶⁸ He was influenced by the ‘Hermeneutical model’ of Luis Segundo (1925-1996) who defined the *hermeneutic circle* as ‘the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal.’³⁶⁹

Unlike Segundo, Imasogie’s emphasis is not upon action in economic, social and political struggles, but in recognising the importance of traditional cultural and religious worldview of Africans in order to make the Scriptural texts relevant to them. Despite the influence upon him by liberation theologians, Imasogie was wary of liberation theology’s emotive language and its emphasis upon the empirico-scientific model or human experience over ‘the deeper spiritual meanings present in the Christian message.’³⁷⁰ He therefore developed a ‘Contextualised and Contemporaneous hermeneutical model,’ commending the early contextualisation efforts of the Church Fathers who ‘formulate their understanding of Christ in the language and culture of the Greco-Roman world’ but thought that ‘Christian theologians in Africa (would have borrowed) a leaf from their forebears in this regard.’³⁷¹ Imasogie’s method of bible interpretation emphasises the ‘literary or synchronic’ rather than the ‘historical-critical or diachronic.’³⁷² It is, however, important to note that there is no one single

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 14.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 11–12, 68ff.

³⁶⁹ Juan Luis. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*. Trans. John Drury, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1977), 8.

³⁷⁰ Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 33.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 18–19.

³⁷² Joe Nkem Ewiwilem observed that the synchronic hermeneutical approach of Osadolor Imasogie is hugely representative of the NBC approach to biblical interpretation. Influenced by Paul Tillich’s correlation between theology and life, Imasogie laid emphasis on African existential situations and employed ‘the word of God as recorded in the Scriptures and as meditated by the Holy Spirit, coupled with the theological heritage of the church and the African cultural world view to adequately ‘scratch where it itches.’ He maintained that the intellectualist approaches like historical and textual criticism fail to address ‘the unique existential needs of African Christians’ (See Joe Nkem Ewiwilem, ‘Pastoral Counselling: A Tool for Spiritual Growth and Maturity among Members of the Nigerian Baptist

hermeneutical approach that can fully and adequately convey the meaning of any given text. As such, it is proper to explore and bring into meaningful dialogue the various hermeneutical approaches such as textual and historical criticism, form criticism, and synchronic and diachronic approaches. Through such encounters, and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, one can draw from these various approaches to make the world of God relevant and to capture the nearest intended meaning and its rightful application. In spite of the common faith tradition I shared with Imasogie, I take issues with his approach on the ground that there is no one single method that can fully explore any biblical text.

Imasogie did not direct his critique against the symbolic anthropologists as such, but his view of the limitations of symbols could well serve the purpose of the criticism of symbolic anthropology. Imasogie's observation includes 'the bane of human inclination to equate the symbols of divine meditation with the divine reality itself.'³⁷³ The imperfection of symbols is due to the imperfection of humans and the tendency for symbols of one culture or generation to lose potency, theological formulation and relevance for another.³⁷⁴

Convention,' Ph. D. Thesis, Liverpool: Liverpool Hope University, January 2011, 152–153; John Enyinnaya, 'The Theology of Osadolor Imasogie: A Methodological Enquiry,' *Pedagogy: The Church, Leadership and Theological Education in Africa: Papers in Honour of Professor Emeritus Osadolor Imasogie Ph. D. @ 80*, eds., Ademola Ishola, Deji Ayegboyin and Sayo Oladejo, 452–459 (Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nig.) Limited, 2009), 453). E. Y. Mullins from SBC, though underscored the importance of illumination in interpreting the Scripture, He also clarified that 'everything in the Bible is not equally binding on us [...] we must get God's message by interpreting under the Spirit's guidance' (Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs*, 15). Thus Mullins highlighted the necessity for both spiritual and critical approaches.

³⁷³ Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 16–17.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

3.6 My Method and Aim

In this research I have combined my practical pastoral experience, knowledge of Urhobo language and ministerial experience of Urhobo Baptists for fifteen years with the ethnographic, anthropological and hermeneutical theories of Malinowski, Turner, Geertz, Sheppy and Imasogie. The research employs Malinowski's theory of functionalism to draw out the functions of Urhobo funeral rites for both individuals and the society, explores the meaning of the ritual symbols with the aid of the symbolic interpretive anthropological theories of Turner and Geertz and cross examines the findings with the theological anthropological theory of Sheppy and the contemporaneous and contextualised hermeneutical theory of Imasogie.

I also worked collaboratively with Urhobo scholars in order to understand the nuances of Urhobo ritual language, burial activities and symbols, to discover and decode their deeper meanings in order facilitate the construction of a reliable bridge between Urhobo Ancestor Veneration and Urhobo Baptist funeral liturgy. The substantial elements of the data are derived from the oral, open-ended and semi-structured interviews which I conducted during my qualitative field research, coupled with my participant observation of contemporary Urhobo funeral rituals carried out in both traditional Urhobo community settings and in the local Urhobo Baptist churches of Delta State Baptist Conference (DSBC).

3.7 Data Collection

I employed the open-ended unstructured and semi-structured interviews approaches. Structured interviews were not used because it is usually 'a one-off occurrence, and there is no presumption of a continuing relationship between the interviewer and the

interviewee.³⁷⁵ The structured interviews technique is more appropriate for conducting survey research which begins with ‘a series of predetermined questions [...] asked, often by interviewers other than the researcher, trained to use invariant wording and to standardize forms of clarification and other responses to queries by interviewees.’³⁷⁶ Also, in most structured interviews, interviewees lack freedom, because they are to select from a set of responses provided by the interviewer.³⁷⁷

A number of reasons account for my choice of open-ended unstructured and semi-structured interviews. These interviews make research freer and more creative, and not subjected to mechanical rules.³⁷⁸ The open setting gives room for what John W. Creswell describes as emerging and unfolding research, not ‘tightly prescribed.’³⁷⁹ They enable various voices to be heard. The differences and problems encountered are discussed and not glossed over.³⁸⁰ They are suitable for collecting stories and narratives. They also helped the researcher to stay focused and probe deeper.³⁸¹ In view of the above reasons, it is therefore clear that the unstructured and semi-structured interviews are more appropriate for this research.

³⁷⁵ Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A guide to Researching Selves and Others* (London: Routledge, 1999), 94.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, ‘Interviewing: The Art of Science,’ in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, eds. Denzin and Lincoln, 62.

³⁷⁹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2009), 175–176.

³⁸⁰ Fontana and Frey, ‘Interviewing: The Art of Science,’ 62.

³⁸¹ Deborah K. Padgett, *Qualitative Methods in Social Work Research: Challenges and Rewards* (London: Sage, 1998), 62.

It is generally held that unstructured and semi-structured interviews are best when combined with participant observation.³⁸² I also employed participant observation techniques, which consisted of my ministerial experience and the funerals I attended during my field trip. For instance, I personally attended the traditional funeral ceremonies in Idjerhe-Urhobo and Orogun-Urhobo. Participant observation is reckoned to be an integral part of a broad range of social research approaches. As a result, Atkinson and Hammersley think it should not be viewed as ‘a particular research technique but a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of researches.’³⁸³

3.8 Data Analysis and Synthesis

In line with nature of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, the questions directed to the participants were not fixed. I went to the field with certain directional questions and as the discussions went on, other questions were generated. In order to work around the first research question on whether the Urhobo Baptists could be faithful to their Baptist faith and respect their cultural identity, I asked the following leading questions which aimed at eliciting robust narration of Urhobo funeral rites by the participants:

1. Which was the first traditional funeral you can remember going to?
2. What made you remember it?
3. Can you tell me more about the items of the event that interested you most and why?
4. Is Urhobo burial the same in all the subcultures?
5. What makes your subculture unique?
6. What are some of the signs and symbols used in the funerals you have attended?
7. What are the messages carried by those signs and symbols?
8. How are the kings and chiefs buried in your subculture?

³⁸² Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 94.

³⁸³ Atkinson and Hammersley, ‘Ethnography and Participant Observation,’ 249.

9. Which was the most recent funeral you have attended?
10. What happened in that funeral?
11. What is unique about that funeral?
12. Is there any other thing you would like to tell me?

On the second research question on whether the DSBC could be faithful to its heritage of faith and at the same time be relevant to Urhobo society, I asked the Baptist leaders specifically the following questions:

1. What were the issues you perceived in Urhobo traditional burial as unsafe for Christians before you introduce the DSBC/NBC policy?
2. Since the introduction of the policy, are church burials now free of all Urhobo rituals?
3. Are you aware of church members performing family rituals that the church did not approve and without informing the pastor?
4. Are there certain aspects of Urhobo burial that the Baptist church found good and could retain?
5. How is the Baptist church attempting to handle the ritual of *eywe ehun* ('waist goat') and any other practice which the Urhobo people found difficult to forgo?
6. Do you have other things you would like to share?

For the analysis of the data I combined the rich description with deep reflections on the interview materials. Most of the interpretations were given by the narrators. Others developed out of the analytic process of interweaving both the inductive and deductive thinking over the materials. Conscious effort was made towards holistic and integrated understanding of data.³⁸⁴ Although thematic connections through the interviews are

³⁸⁴ Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Thesis: A Roadmap from Beginning to End* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 96, 98.

presented in details in chapter nine, section 9.4, it is important to state at this methodological stage the value of responses generated from the field work. These connections include the significance of Urhobo burial from the Urhobo perspectives for family unity, spiritual fulfilment, customary, biological, cultural and sociological requirements, and as a rite of continuity. Cognisance of the Baptist position on Urhobo burial as ‘paganic’ and burdensome is also taken and the consequent struggle in the Urhobo Baptists thoughts.

3.9 Research Findings

Through this research I discovered that firstly, conversion to Baptist faith does not completely remove Urhobo funeral culture. The Urhobo attach great value to the total complex of their traditional funeral ritual and activities as constituting the real burial act. They also perform *iyē ẹgọ* (‘serve their ancestors’). Secondly, I also discovered that the DSBC found it difficult to incorporate the cherished Urhobo family and symbolic rituals of burial into its liturgy because of the understanding that the rituals were based on the worship of the dead. The Baptist church could only tolerate the social aspect of Urhobo burial but advocating it must be with minimal expenses. Thirdly, I however discovered that beyond the service of ancestors are other essential factors which the Urhobo attach to their burial rites. These factors include history—question of origin, identity, solidarity and continuity, all of which are jeopardised if Urhobo burial is thrown away completely. Fourthly, there is a strong indication that Urhobo Baptists will appreciate a Baptist funeral liturgy with cultural relevance than the one which seeks to ostracise them from their ancestral heritage. I therefore argue for the integration of certain vital aspects of Urhobo funeral rites into the Baptist funeral liturgy. The integration could save the

Urhobo Baptists from 'split-level Christianity' and the DSBC from struggling with members' divided loyalties. It could also enhance Baptist mission in Urhobo Land.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The British Sociological Association 1996 requires that sociological research must be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. It means the researcher must explain to the people what the research is about, who is undertaken and financing it, why is it been undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated³⁸⁵ There ought to be assurance of confidentiality and anonymity as well, as much as possible because there should be no covert research.

In line with the above requirements, the consents of the participants were duly sought and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, the use of coded designation by numbers '1' to '26' is applied in this research as stated in Appendix 1, on the table of participants. The participants are also called respondents in this study. Their responses were recorded in field notes, audiotapes and videotapes and later transcribed into a typed written form. In order to adhere to the University regulations concerning the storage of the data collected, the data are held electronically on the Liverpool Hope University computer system under a username folder password protected behind a firewall and backed up on CD-ROM. When I leave the university, a similar arrangement for safe keeping on another computer will be made. The CD-ROM backup of digital files, the printed transcripts of interviews and the taped materials, will be kept for five years after the research under lock and key in an office filing cabinet at the University. The audio/video recordings will thereafter be destroyed /neutralised by

³⁸⁵ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 46.

deletion if they are digitally saved on computer or by physical burning if they are hard copy.

3.11 Limitations of the Study

3.11.1 Problems of Ethnographic Methods and how they are addressed

Despite the relevance of ethnographic methods to this study, there are nonetheless certain limitations to be aware of. In this direction, Atkinson and Hammersley identified the problem of ‘ethnographic myths’ or of generalisations, most especially since the group to be studied may not always be ‘internally homogeneous’ or ‘democratically organized.’³⁸⁶ This point is relevant to this study as there may be different perspectives to the subject of this research even within the study group, where no one voice can adequately represent all the views. Despite this problem, the fieldwork approach remains the most appropriate method to derive a fair understanding of the people.

Onigu O. Otite, an Urhobo scholar and a historical anthropologist also identified two problems associated with the use of oral narratives. One is over-concentration, whereby a narrator may over-concentrate on the aspects he or she considers most important while omitting others.³⁸⁷ The other is the problem of chronology or failure to assess time accurately.³⁸⁸ For example, the oral narrators may lack specificity in the actual year, month or day of occurrences, but make reference to blocks of time and events such as ‘regimes, epochs, disasters or accidents in history.’³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ Atkinson and Hammersley, ‘Ethnography and Participant Observation,’ 253.

³⁸⁷ Otite, ‘On Sources and the Writing of History without Written Records,’ 5.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

The problem of over-concentration can apply to both historical and ritual studies but is addressed in this research by the connective interaction of data and interviews because what one person omits, another may emphasise. The matter of chronology does not have as much effect on ritual studies in this thesis as it would on the history of the people, since in ritual studies the focus is on how people behave and what motivates such behaviour. Similarly, one of the key objectives in this ritual study is to decode the meaning that the Urhobo attach to their burial activities, which are communicated by what they say and do in funerals. Through the study, I deduced the Urhobo reason for their actions without imposing on them my own reasons which might not accurately represent their worldview.

In this venture, paying close attention to and recording oral tradition and narratives is essential for unearthing some of the ancient folklore and salient concepts of the people that have not been documented in writing. For example, the narratives from my respondents made it abundantly clear that the concept of burial among the Urhobo conveys more than the notion of physical interment. Rather, it points to the ritual activities performed to usher the spirit of the deceased into *erivwin* ('the spiritual abode'). This broader meaning was conveyed by a respondent who said that 'if the children are not ready because they are not financially capable, only the interment will be done and the burial postponed.'³⁹⁰ Another respondent said, 'most times, the corpse is buried before the actual burial ceremony.'³⁹¹ He explained further that after the family might have performed the *ebrowiotor* ('interment') which literally means to bury the

³⁹⁰ Respondent 1.

³⁹¹ Respondent 21.

corpse, they will still ask the children whether they are ‘ready to bury their father or mother.’³⁹² The burial being referred to here is the *erhuerhe* (‘the ritual burial’).

Onigu O. Otite,³⁹³ Agberia,³⁹⁴ Wilfred Onoriose,³⁹⁵ and Simeon E. Erukanure³⁹⁶ equally engaged with oral traditions in their studies of the Urhobo people.

3.11.2 Reflexivity, Insider/outside Controversy

In conducting a qualitative study, I adopted the reflexive approach. Jane E. Elliott identified three different approaches to qualitative research, namely ‘the naturalist or realist,’ ‘the ethnomethodological or constructivist’ and the reflexive.³⁹⁷ While explaining the differences, Elliott clarified that the naturalists focus solely on interviews as presented by the respondents as resources to understand people. The constructivists utilise the interviews as aids to construct their understanding of people. Scholars using the reflexive approach attempt to incorporate the approach of both the naturalists and the constructivists. More importantly, they recognise that the relationship between the researcher and the researched has a bearing on the product of research.³⁹⁸

In addressing the subject of reflexivity, Charlotte Aull Davies, who specialises in both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies observed that the researcher’s personal history, discipline, social cultural circumstances and relationship with the

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Onigu O. Otite, ‘On Sources and the Writing of History without Written Records,’ in *The Urhobo People*, ed. Onigu Otite, 1–8: 3ff.

³⁹⁴ Agberia, ‘The *Adane-Okpe* Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People,’ 261.

³⁹⁵ Wilfred Onoriose, ‘Urhobo Kingdoms and Dialects,’ in *The Urhobo Language Today*, eds. Tanure Ojaide and Rose Aziza, 95–103 (Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2007), 95.

³⁹⁶ Simeon E. Erukanure, ‘Origin and Use of Some Urhobo Traditional Symbols,’ in *Studies in Arts, Religion & Culture Among the Urhobo & Isoko People*, eds. G. G. Darah, E. S. Akama and J. T. Agberia, 23–30 (Port Harcourt: Pam Unique Publishing Coy. Ltd., 2001, reprinted 2003), 23.

³⁹⁷ Jane E. Elliot, *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 20.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 20–21.

informants are all reflected in the research result.³⁹⁹ It thus becomes clear that in field based research, reflexivity cannot be avoided. Researchers' earlier claims of objectivity by positioning their presuppositions as inconspicuous or invisible has not proved realistic. Hence it is advisable that the researcher's reflexivity or what Judith Okely termed his or her 'specificity and individuality [...] be acknowledged, explored, and put to creative use.'⁴⁰⁰ My reflexive approach to this research stems from my positions as a pastor among the Urhobo Baptists, and as a Yorùbá which is a major ethnic group in Nigeria and in the NBC. Both positions raise potential questions bordering on power and which are kept in perspective. Moreover, I became a Christian in the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), and started my ministerial career there before crossing to the NBC. The significance of my first church denominational background is that CAC as an African Independent Church (AIC) has made far reaching impact in contextualizing African cultural practices into its ministries than the NBC. Given my background therefore, I am potentially more open to contextualization than many Baptists of the NBC, who may have no direct experience of African indigenous Christianity.

Another concern with this study is the insider/outsider debate, a two-fold problem which concerns whether a non-group member can actually get to the root nuances and meanings of the study subject in the same way as a member. It also involves the related question as to whether a person can ever study his/her own group objectively. Davies argues that research so close to self as autobiographical ethnography is not problem-free;⁴⁰¹ neither is native ethnography as observed by Margery Wolf, who stated that

³⁹⁹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 5.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 8; Judith Okely, *Own or Other Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 28.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 178ff.

‘there are also disadvantages to studying “at home.”’⁴⁰² Whether a researcher is an insider or outsider, the research can be weak or strong. In relating the insider/outsider debate to the translation model of contextualization, Stephen B. Bevans comments,

Most translators will admit that while it is advantageous for the one translating to be participant in the context into which the message is being translated, it is not absolutely necessary. What is important is that one be a person who has understood the Christian message and who is in creative touch with the experience, culture, or perspective in question.⁴⁰³

With regard to the subject group, I am both an insider and outsider. On the one hand, being a Yorubá, a Baptist pastor, and researching from a British University within British society together makes me an outsider to the Urhobo, to the Urhobo traditional religionists and to Urhobo who largely do not have a British formal education. On the other hand, I am an insider to the Urhobo Baptists as a serving pastor of the NBC. The important thing is that I remain aware always of my dual status and its possible impact on my work.

Despite my long pastoral experience among the Urhobo coupled with the working knowledge of Urhobo language, being a non-Urhobo has its own effect as there could be some linguistic and cultural intricacies which I may not be conversant with. This limitation is however adequately compensated for through meaningful engagement with Urhobo people and their scholars in England, USA and in Urhobo Land to crosscheck the accuracy of certain traditional ideas, meanings and nuances. The rich glossary of Urhobo words in Appendix 2 resulted from such an extensive consultation. In the next

⁴⁰² Margery Wolf, ‘Writing Ethnography: The Poetics and Politics of Culture,’ in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. Russell G. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 1999), 361.

⁴⁰³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 40.

chapter, the target is to understand the historical, religious, cultural, linguistic, geographical, and climatic contexts of Urhobo Land and their effects on funeral rites.

PART II–ETHNORELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

CHAPTER FOUR – WHO ARE THE URHOBO?

This chapter examines the historical, cultural, linguistic, geographical, and climatic aspects of the Urhobo contexts. These different aspects are interrelated and have bearing on the Urhobo socio-cultural and psycho-religious expressions of their funeral tradition.

4.1 History and Ethnic Neighbours

The Urhobo are a combination of both the original inhabitants and later immigrants that settled in the present Urhobo Land for such a long time that they now consider themselves as one.⁴⁰⁴ John Waddington Hubbard (1896–1980/88), CMS missionary,⁴⁰⁵ J. Egharevba (1893–1981), a Benin historian,⁴⁰⁶ Obaro Ikime (1936–), an Isoko and retired Professor of History from the University of Ibadan (1964–1990),⁴⁰⁷ Onigu Otite, an Urhobo scholar, political sociologist and social anthropologist, and Peter Ekeh⁴⁰⁸ recorded that the Urhobo migrants were in different waves from places like *Aka* ('Ancient Bini City' in the present Edo State), Sudan and Egypt, Ile-Ife in Yorùbá Land, Igbo, Ijaw and Isoko. The origins from Benin, Igbo and Ijaw, however, remain the most

⁴⁰⁴ Otite, 'A peep into the History of the Urhobo,' 10–11, 18, 23; Onigu Otite speculates that the movements must have occurred between 200 and 2000 years ago; Otite, 'Autonomy and Dependence: the Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria,' 38; Diakparomre, 'Symbolism in Urhobo Masks and Mask Performance,' 468.

⁴⁰⁵ Hubbard was missionary in Warri Province around 1940s. For dates of his birth and death, see Judith Frances Hubbard, ed., 'Descendants of Waddington,' collected from family papers, September 2001, available from http://www.anotherurl.com/judith/FAMILY%20HISTORY/descendants_of_waddington.htm, Internet, accessed 10 February 2012.

⁴⁰⁶ J. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960), 5, 65, 70. Egharevba was a Benin Kingdom historian, and traditional chief, appointed the curator of Benin Museum in 1946); Uyilawa Usuanlele and Toyin Falola, 'The Scholarship of Jacob Egharevba of Benin,' *History in Africa*, 21 (1994), 303–318: 303–304.

⁴⁰⁷ Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 6–7; Obaro Ikime, available from <http://www.librarything.com/author/ikimeobaro>, Internet, accessed 11 February 2012.

⁴⁰⁸ Ekeh, 'A Profile of Urhobo Culture,' in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 1–50.

established tradition among the Urhobo sub-cultures until the present time.⁴⁰⁹ Most Urhobo kings earlier sought for recognition and consequently received their royal beaded crown and staff of office from the *Oba* ('king') of Bini (in Edo Land)⁴¹⁰ and others from Ijaw. The question of origin heightens the consciousness of ascertaining a person's ancestral lineage among the Urhobo. They therefore use funeral as an avenue to straighten their records by recognising their ancestors. Hence it is traditionally mandatory and desired that Urhobo people are buried in their ancestral home lands.

The Urhobo share borders with the *Itsekiri* to the west, the *Ijaw* to the south-west, the *Isoko* to which it is more ethnically related to the south-east, the *Bini* to the north and the *Ukwani* to the north-east.⁴¹¹ Obaro Ikime,⁴¹² Samuel Erivwo⁴¹³ Janet Eruvbetere,⁴¹⁴ Peter Ekeh,⁴¹⁵ and Felix Ibru reported that the Urhobo and the *Isoko* were regarded as a single ethnic group before and during the British colonial era (1901–1961) because 'the cultural walls that separate them are thin.'⁴¹⁶ The *Isoko* are, however, presently

⁴⁰⁹ Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 3–5. There is another tradition of Urhobo origin which points to Urhobo 'remote ancestor' from whom the founders of the Urhobo sub-cultural units descended (See Otite, ed. *The Urhobo People* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) Limited, 1982), viii).

⁴¹⁰ Ikime stated that Benin was 'a repository of power,' and its *Oba*, a powerful ruler, venerated 'as a near-deity.' As a result, the approval or the disapproval of the *Oba* of Benin increases or reduces the worth of an Urhobo *Ovie* ('King'). See Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 13–14.

⁴¹¹ Ibru, 'Urhobo Bridge to the Neighbourhood of the Niger Delta and Nigeria,' 3–5. See Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 2.

⁴¹² Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1. Ikime states that Urhobo and *Isoko* were together as one administrative division until 1964, when *Isoko* was given its own division (Ibid).

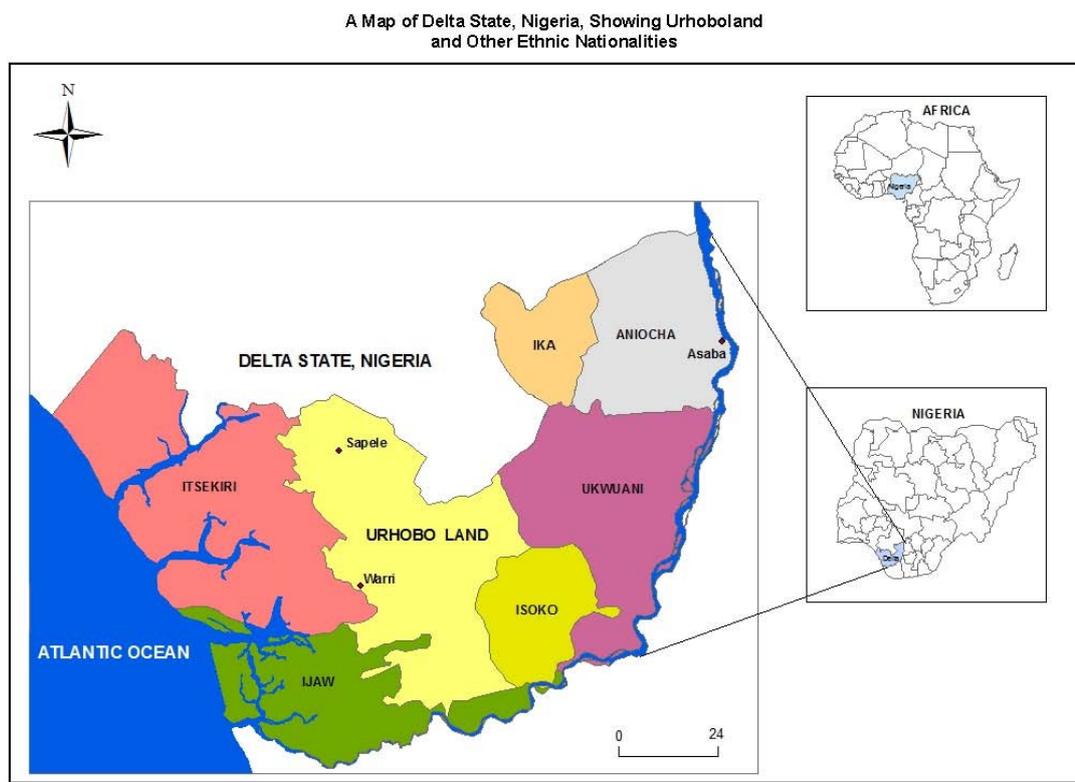
⁴¹³ Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 2, 41 and 203

⁴¹⁴ Eruvbetere, 'Urhobo Traditional Marriage and Modern Influences on Its Institution,' 397.

⁴¹⁵ Ekeh, 'On the matter of Sub-cultural units and Kingdoms in Urhobo History and Culture,' 4.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

recognised as a separate ethnic group. Below is a map of Delta State in Nigeria, showing Urhobo Land and its neighbouring ethnicities.⁴¹⁷



Map drawn by Professor Francis Odemerho, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, USA

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4.2 Geographical Location and Population Estimation

The Urhobo live on the north-western fringe of the Niger River delta,⁴¹⁸ an area covering 5,000 square kilometres. The exact figure of the Urhobo population is

⁴¹⁷ Francis Odemerho, 'A Map of Delta State, Nigeria, Showing Urhoboland and Other Ethnic Nationalities,' available from http://www.waado.org/NigerDelta/Maps/delta_state/delta_state_ethnic.html, Internet, accessed 8 December 2012.

⁴¹⁸ Albert O. Aweto, 'Outline Geography of Urhobo Land,' in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 683–698: 684. The Urhobo Land is bounded by latitudes 5° 15' and 6° North and longitudes 5° 40' and 6° 25' East (See O. A. Aweto and J. L. Igben, 'Geography of Urhobo Land,' in *The Urhobo People*, 2nd ed., ed. Onigu Otite (Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Limited, 2003), 11; Eriwwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 2). The Urhobo land is about eighty-two kilometres in its longest dimension and about forty-eight in its widest. It is traversed by six main rivers and their tributaries, namely Jamieson, Ethiopie, Benin, Warri, Forcados, and Escravos rivers. (See Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family: The Urhobo Ruling Clan of Okpe Kingdom*, 1; 'Urhobo Progressive Union, Programme for launching of Urhobo Development Fund for the proposed UPU cultural center main auditorium' (n. p: n. p, 27 April, 2002), 7; Foss, 'An Introduction to the Urhobo,' 21).

unknown because ethnicity and religion are excluded from Nigerian census. The 2006 census figure however put the population in Urhobo Land at 1,879,155.⁴¹⁹ The Urhobo constitute a minority within Nigeria, but in the Delta State, they occupy nine⁴²⁰ of the twenty-five Local Government Council Areas, thus constituting the majority ethnic group within the State. Commenting on their minority status in Nigeria, Felix Ibru, the President-General of the Urhobo Progress Union (UPU), stated that the Urhobo did not receive adequate attention from the British colonial administrators and the Nigerian national leaders at the early stage of the Nigerian independence.⁴²¹ Ibru understood this neglect as the basis of challenge for the early Urhobo leaders like Mukoro Mowe (1890–1948) who initiated the struggle for equality and competition by the Urhobo with other Nigerian ‘Ethnic Nationalities’⁴²² in the fields of education, the arts, and business.⁴²³ Ibru’s assertion finds support in a statement made by Ibrahim Babangida (Major General, retired, 1941–), former military president of Nigeria (1985–1993) that ‘ethnic nationalism is rooted in the colonial social formation of the country’ and that ‘civilian and military regimes in the post independence period had themselves increased the

These rivers are the tributaries in the delta of River Niger entering the Atlantic Ocean. Onigu Otite explains that the UPU was formed in 1930s to promote the unity of all the Urhobo sub-cultural units (See Onigu Otite, ‘The Urhobo Progress Union,’ in *The Urhobo People*, ed. Onigu Otite, 262).

⁴¹⁹ The total population from the nine Local Government Areas that make up Urhobo land in the most recent census in 2006 is 1,879,155. See Nigerian Population Census 2006, available from <http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/nbsapps/Connections/Pop2006.pdf>, Internet, accessed on 26 January 2011.

⁴²⁰ The nine Local Government areas are: Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Sapele, Udu, Ughelli, North, Ughelli South, Uvwie, and Warri South (See ‘Urhobo Progressive Union, Programme for launching of Urhobo Development Fund,’ 7; See also, Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, xiv, 6).

⁴²¹ Felix Ibru, ‘Urhobo Bridge to the Neighbourhood of the Niger Delta and Nigeria,’ A welcome address presented as president general of Urhobo Progress Union on the occasion of Urhobo Unity Summit (Effurun: n. p, 30 July 2009), 2.

⁴²² See Ibrahim Babangida, ‘Ethnic Nationalities and Nigerian State,’ Excerpts from a Lecture delivered at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos, December 2002, available from http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/earticles/ethnic_nationalities_and_the_nig.htm, Internet, accessed 11 February 2012.

⁴²³ Obaro Ikime, ‘Chief Mukoro Mowoe: Leader of the Urhobo,’ in *History of the Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Petet P. Ekeh, 419.

variety and complexity of the phenomenon.⁴²⁴ As cultural identity is one of the elements of ethnic nationality,⁴²⁵ then, the Urhobo are prone to maintain their funeral culture as one of the key markers of their cultural identity.

The factor of minority and majority ethnic groups exacerbates the struggles for political control within the Nigerian political structure. Usually, the minority groups feel marginalised and this background could bear on what happens among the Urhobo Baptists, among whom the imposition of ritual could be regarded as use of ecclesiastical power by a majority group within the denominational administration. The DSBC burial policy has however not displaced the Urhobo traditional funeral among the Baptists, but only reduces it to a procedure within the family. This development relates to the use of power and to the subversion of power, but not in the socio-economic and political sense which Barry Hindes, Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault explored. Hindes and Gramsci underscored the importance of consent by the people over whom power is exercised for legitimacy.⁴²⁶ Foucault however was not satisfied with the idea of consent as automatic stamp of sovereignty and legitimacy but emphasised liberty to engage or disengage.⁴²⁷ However, in the context of the DSBC funeral policy, when one considers that the Conference discussed and adopted the policy in 1997,⁴²⁸ and yet that the situation of non-compliance remains; it begs the question of whether the people truly gave their consent or were constrained to? Nevertheless, consent in this case may justify

⁴²⁴ See Ibrahim Babangida, 'Ethnic Nationalities and Nigerian State,' Excerpts from a Lecture delivered at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos, December 2002, available from http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/earticles/ethnic_nationalities_and_the_nig.htm, Internet, accessed 11 February 2012.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Barry Hindes, *Discourses of Power from Hobbes to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 2; Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 24.

⁴²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, 1, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 220.

⁴²⁸ Delta State Baptist Conference, *Book of Reports and Minutes of the Third Annual Session*, 34–35.

legitimacy but has not procured effectiveness because the consent did not meet with conviction. It then points to the application of traditional hierarchical theory of ideological power in the ecclesiastical setting, in which the subjects do not query the leaders even when not fully satisfied.

4.3 The *ikpotọ* ('sub-cultural units')

As indicated earlier, the Urhobo ethnic group is subdivided into twenty-three distinct *ikpotọ*, namely, the *Agbarha-Ame*, *Agbarha Otor*, *Agbarho*, *Agbon*, *Arhavwarien*, *Avwraka*, *Ephron*, *Evwreni*, *Eghwu*, *Idjerhe*, *Mosogar Oghara*, *Ogo*, *Okere*, *Okparebe*, *Okpe*, *Olomu*, *Orogun*, *Udu*, *Ughelli*, *Ughievwen*, *Uvwie*, and *Uwherun*.⁴²⁹ Each *ikpotọ* has its ancestral headquarter,⁴³⁰ where the founding ancestors lived. The descendants therefore attach value to the place as their 'spiritual home' and build shrines to venerate their ancestors annually or during important occasions.⁴³¹

Each of the *ekpotọ* has its proper rituals. For instance, *Idjerhe* celebrates the *ughe-oku* festival in honour of *okunovu* (river goddess) in February. During each festival, *Idjerhe* villages gather and dance. Of special interest is the presentation by a dancer, who is a male and has tied to his legs two high sticks.⁴³² During this ceremony, all the *oyavwe-emetẹ* ('circumcised girls'), anointed with cam wood lotion array themselves for the public view of *Idjerhe* people and for the prospective suitors. Other festivals of *Idjerhe*

⁴²⁹ Ekeh, 'Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature & Outline of Urhobo History,' 18.

⁴³⁰ The *ikpotọ* and their cultic centres are as follow: *Agbarha-Ame* (Warri), *Agbarha Otor* (Agbarha Otor), *Agbarho* (Agbarho), *Agbon* (Otorho-Agbon), *Arhavwarien*, *Avwraka* (Abraka), *Ephron* (Effurun), *Evwreni*, *Eghwu*, *Idjerhe* (Otorho-Idjerhe), *Mosogar* (Mosogar), *Oghara* (Oghara-efe), *Ogo*, *Okere*, *Okparebe*, *Okpe* (Ororokpe), *Olomu*, *Orogun* (Orogun), *Udu*, *Ughelli* (Ughelli), *Ughievwen* (Otu-Jeremi), *Uvwie* (Uvwie), and *Uwherun*.

⁴³¹ Ekeh, 'Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature & Outline of Urhobo History,' 20.

⁴³² This type of dancing is called *ikelike* ('stilts dancing') in Urhobo.

are *orẹ* and *iyeri*.⁴³³ The *iyeri* ('fish festival') occurs every August as a harvest and feasting festival.⁴³⁴ Similarly, the *Agbarha-Otor* celebrates *ekene* festival once every twenty years but the *orẹ-reravwin* (animal festival) and *orẹ-riyerin* (fish festival) are observed more often.⁴³⁵ The rituals and festivals by other sub-cultures are listed in the table of features of Urhobo *ikpotọ* in Appendix 3.

As far as leadership is concerned, most of the *ekpotọ* have their kings but the *Orogun* still maintain gerontocracy, which is leadership by *okpara-uku*, ('the eldest man'). Of the sub-cultures that practice the monarchical system, succession is primogeniture⁴³⁶ or modified primogeniture⁴³⁷ in some and republican⁴³⁸ in others. Certain sub-cultures like the Idjerhe and Oghara originally practiced gerontocracy before they changed to the monarchical system, which they nonetheless, still combined with gerontocracy at some levels of administration.⁴³⁹ The leader is responsible to maintain the shrines and perform sacrifices to the gods and ancestors, either directly or by delegation, because the wellbeing of the whole *ekpotọ* depends on the continuous 'goodwill of the gods and the ancestors.'⁴⁴⁰ Hence the *ovie* or the *okpara-uku* and their council of chiefs must rule according to the laws of the ancestors.⁴⁴¹ As at 1963, the *ekpotọ* of *Okpẹ* was the largest

⁴³³ Erivwo, 'Idjerhe,' 60.

⁴³⁴ Respondent 5.

⁴³⁵ Respondent 23.

⁴³⁶ Succession is by the firstborn son of the last king and a single ruling family is usually involved. Example is Ughelli-Urhobo

⁴³⁷ Succession is rotated among specific ruling houses who are the direct descendants of the progenitor of the subculture. Okpẹ-Urhobo is in this category.

⁴³⁸ Succession is rotated among the quarters of the subculture and the quarter chooses its candidate. This system is practiced in Oghara-Urhobo.

⁴³⁹ Onajite Igere Adjara and Andy Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 30–123. Obaro Ikime noted some measure of complexity and fluidity in Urhobo and Isoko leadership system. He stated that there sometimes could be 'a dual or tripartite arrangement of officers, all equally vital, and each dependent on the other for the efficient management and discharge of the duties allotted to him' (See Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 22).

⁴⁴⁰ Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 18, 22.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

and that of *Okparabe* the smallest.⁴⁴² Placing those *ekpotọ* in the same positions may however be contested today (2012). Many changes have occurred in the past forty-nine years and there is no accurate census to account for the actual figures.⁴⁴³

Most Urhobo believe that their founders were males with the exception of *Orogun* who was a female,⁴⁴⁴ being the daughter of *Oghwoghwa* and therefore a sister to three brothers, *Ogo*, *Agbarha* and *Ughelli*. This tradition holds that *Orogun* married a man from the neighbouring ethnic group of *Ukwani/Ukwale/Ndokwa*.⁴⁴⁵ The holders of this view explained it as the reason for the *Orogun* descendants being partly Urhobo and partly *Ukwani*; and also for its location at the border line between the Urhobo and the *Ukwani*. Internal evidence includes the clear division of *Orogun* main town into two parts of those who speak Urhobo and *Ukwani* languages.⁴⁴⁶ One of my interview

⁴⁴² The 1963 population figure of 75,519 for *Okpe* was the largest followed by Agbon with 62,064 and 1,701 for *Okparabe* as the smallest among the cultural units (see Otite, ed. *The Urhobo People* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, (Nig.) Limited, 1982), 208). The tendencies are that the same proportion may have remained or that a unit like Agbon may have overtaken Okpe within the last forty-nine years. In addition the inclusion of Okere-Urobo which is 'relatively small' and 'restricted by limited land' (see Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 115) as new subculture and which was not different entities in 1963 may have changed the position ascribed to *Okparabe*

⁴⁴³ Onigu Otite, 'History as a Process: A Study of the Urhobo of the Midwestern State of Nigeria,' *African Historical Studies*, 4, no. 1, Boston University African Center (1971): 43; Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family: The Urhobo Ruling Clan of Okpe Kingdom*, 4. Otite and Asagba who are from Okpe and based on 1963 figures claimed Okpe to be the largest unit but in 2007, Peter P. Ekeh who belongs to Agbon ranks Agbon with Okpe as the most populous sub-cultures of Urhobo without clarifying which is larger (See Ekeh, 'Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature & Outline of Urhobo History,' 19). Adjara the *Ovie* of Ogo and Omokri, maintain the first place for Okpe followed by Agbon in population and land mass (See Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 72, 94).

⁴⁴⁴ His Royal Highness Onajite Igere Adjara III, the reigning *Ovie* of Ogor and his co-author, Andy Omokri supports the tradition that *Orogun* was a female child and sister to three brothers, Ogor, Ughelli and Agbarha who are all together the children of Oghwoghwa (See Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 39, 46).

⁴⁴⁵ The three names refer to the same ethnic group. The variety is a result of various pronunciations by different groups. Outsiders call them *Ukwale*, the people call themselves *Ukwani*. Hence forth this researcher would prefer *Ukwani* since it is preferred by the people themselves.

⁴⁴⁶ Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 67–68.

respondents explained that the interaction of these border people is reflected in their funeral rites as well as shared burial practices.⁴⁴⁷

However, a chief in *Orogun ẹkpoto* negates the above view-point that *Orogun* was a female and maintains that *Orogun* was a male child like all other Urhobo founding ancestors. He did not deny *Orogun's* affinity to the neighbouring ethnic group of *Ukwani* but considered it as not enough reason to suggest that *Orogun* was a female.⁴⁴⁸

4.4 The Urhobo Language

The Urhobo language belongs to the Edoid language family⁴⁴⁹ that evolved out of Kwa branch of Niger-Congo family⁴⁵⁰ and consequently shares a similar phonology, morphology and syntax with others like Edo, Esan, and Isoko in that family.⁴⁵¹ Andrew Onoawarie Edevwie illustrated such parallel by translating the English word 'box' into the Edoid family language group as follow:

Edo: *Ẹkpeti*
Esan: *Ẹkpẹti*
Etsako: *Ẹkpeti*
Igbo: *Akpati*
Itsekiri: *Ẹkpeti*
Isoko: *Ẹkpeti, Etehe*
Isɔn: *Ẹkpede, Ẹkpeti*
Urhobo: *Ẹkpeti*
Owan: *Akpoti*
Ukwani: *Akpa*⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁷ Respondent 23.

⁴⁴⁸ Respondent 20.

⁴⁴⁹ Tanure Ojaide, 'Evolution of the Urhobo Language,' *The Urhobo Language Today*, Tanure Ojaide and Rose Aziza, eds, 1–20: 3–4.

⁴⁵⁰ Mowarin, 'Language Endangerment,' 523.

⁴⁵¹ Onoawarie Edevbie, 'Urhobo Naming Practices: Principles and Cross-Cultural Applications,' in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, 74.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

Tanure Ojaide also observed that each of the Urhobo and Esan words for ‘water’ (*ami* [U] and *ame* [E]), ‘money’ (*igho* [U] *eegho* [E]), and ‘come’ (*yanre* [U] and *vware* [E]) have corresponding sounds.⁴⁵³ Simultaneously, the Urhobo language has features which distinguish it from other related languages group.⁴⁵⁴ For instance, most words start with vowels⁴⁵⁵ and letters like ‘*q*’ and ‘*x*’ are not in use. There could be two, three or four consonants together in a word and there is dominating use of letter ‘*r*’ for possessive cases and other sundry applications.⁴⁵⁶

Of particular interest to this research is the relevance of the Urhobo language to Urhobo ritual or liturgy. Although the English language is presently used during worship, occasional interjection with Urhobo songs or other forms of expression elicits an enthusiastic reaction from the congregation. The positive response is an indication of the power of vernacular to ritual and liturgy because there are certain nuances that no other language can communicate as the people’s vernacular. The Urhobo language is rich with maxim, proverbs, wise sayings, poems and songs,⁴⁵⁷ some of which are used during ceremonies by the leader of the ceremony and responded to by the participating adults as libation is poured. In these sayings are petition for peace, progress, long life and prosperity for the people gathered and their relations. The leader could be the eldest or any other respected member of the family and the Urhobo adults have knowledge of appropriate responses to their ritual pronouncements.

⁴⁵³ Tanure Ojaide, ‘Evolution of the Urhobo Language,’ 4.

⁴⁵⁴ Otite, ‘Urhobo Identity,’ 256–257.

⁴⁵⁵ Edevbie, ‘Urhobo Naming Practices: Principles and Cross-Cultural Applications,’ 75–77.

⁴⁵⁶ Ekeh, ‘A Profile of Urhobo Culture,’ 32–33.

⁴⁵⁷ Efeglo, ‘Urhobo People and their Culture as Nigerian,’ available from Urhobo people and their culture as Nigerian.mht, Internet, accessed 7 May 2011, 5.

4.5 Climate and Occupation

Urhobo Land has a ‘humid subequatorial’ climate, ‘rain/swamp forest vegetation’⁴⁵⁸ and the people’s occupations include farming, fishing, lumbering, trading, mining, palm wine tapping, transportation,⁴⁵⁹ and civil service. The discovery of crude oil in Urhobo Land in the 1960s, coupled with the desire for formal education, ushered a paradigm shift into the occupational preference of the people. Rural-urban migration increased and the people sought employment with oil companies which is more lucrative. The oil industry, however, had adverse effects on agriculture. There was a shortage of farm land, labour and productivity decreased as a result of oil spills and gas flaring. Other related disasters⁴⁶⁰ which included the loss of many lives⁴⁶¹ brought untold hardship on the people.⁴⁶² The inability of the Nigerian governments to adequately manage the wealth from the crude oil and gas for the welfare of the people resulted in ‘unemployment and its attendant anti-social habits’⁴⁶³ such as youth restiveness. The result is an uncondusive atmosphere which affects burial processes in Urhobo settlements because the youths make impossible demands of huge amount of money from people who take their deceased for burial in their ancestral villages.

⁴⁵⁸ Aweto, ‘Outline Geography of Urhobo Land,’ 683.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 693–694.

⁴⁶⁰ Aweto, ‘Agriculture in Urhoboland,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 699–716: 714.

⁴⁶¹ Peter P. Ekeh, ‘Petroleum Oil Fire Disasters in Urhoboland’ 1998–2000,’ in *History of the Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 619–652: 622–623, 636 and 642. The exact dates of the fire disasters are as follow: Atiegwo, 17 October 1998, Ekakpamre, 17–18 September 1999 and Egborode, 10 July 2000. These oil fire disasters claimed over 1000 lives.

⁴⁶² Terisa E. Turner, ‘Urhobo Women’s Uprising against the Nigerian Oil Industry in the 1980s,’ in *History of the Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 582–618: 591–592, 595, 597; See also, Foss, ‘An Introduction to the Urhobo,’ 23, 26; Peter P. Ekeh, ‘Petroleum Oil Fire Disasters in Urhoboland’ 1998–2000,’ 619–652; Bright U. Ekuerehare, ‘Urhobo and the National Question: Urhobo’s Enviroment and Natural Resources,’ in *History of The Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 653–667: 656.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

4.6 The Physical Environment and its Influence on Urhobo Traditional Religions

The ecological regulation theory of religion which argues that ‘religion is a master control system regulating the interaction of human groups with their environments,’⁴⁶⁴ goes a long way to explain the religious beliefs and practices among Urhobo. In taking this argument further, Ekeh,⁴⁶⁵ Erivwo⁴⁶⁶ and Foss⁴⁶⁷ view the Urhobo physical environment of forests and waters⁴⁶⁸ and the consequent agrarian society as the cause of attraction to the worship of the *ɛḍjoraghwa* (‘forest spirits’), *ɛḍjoram̄* (‘water spirits’), *aziza*, *ɛḍjoto* (‘land/earth spirits’), *ɛḍjenu* (‘atmosphere spirits’) and *ɛḍjokpa* (‘oil-palm spirits’). To Erivwo, such overwhelming environmental influence on religion account for the Urhobo people, being surrounded by numerous creeks and tributaries of Niger Delta, inclination to the seas for their deities.⁴⁶⁹

As indicated earlier, the Urhobo worship of environmental spirits or deities and *Oghene* is intertwined with their commitment to ancestors. Although, they believe that they can reach *Oghene* directly or through the deities⁴⁷⁰ and *ɛsem̄* (‘ancestors’), they still seek

⁴⁶⁴ James W. Dow, ‘The Evolution of Religion: Three Anthropological Approaches,’ *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (March 1, 2006), 67–91: 74.

⁴⁶⁵ Ekeh, ‘A Profile of Urhobo Culture,’ 4.

⁴⁶⁶ Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 50. For more details on *aziza*, see Ochuko J. Tonukari, ‘Aziza: King of the Urhobo Forest’, In Urhobo Historical Society website, available from <http://www.waado.org/urhoboculture/religion/tonukari/Aziza.htm>, Internet, accessed 26 February 2012.

⁴⁶⁷ Foss, ‘An Introduction to the Urhobo,’ 27.

⁴⁶⁸ According to Ekeh, most of Urhobo (and Isoko) lands were virgin rainforests interspersed with rivers, streams and lakes that were most probably pristine.’ See Ekeh, ‘Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature & Outline of Urhobo History,’ 19.

⁴⁶⁹ Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 3.

⁴⁷⁰ Some of Urhobo traditional deities include are *ɛḍjo*, *orhan* and *igbe*. The *orhan* (plural, *erhan*) is a personal god, represented with ‘personal images’ in ‘personal shrines.’ Examples are *urhievbe* (‘destiny’), *ob̄* (‘hand’) for wealth, and *iphri* (to control ‘aggression’) (See Foss, ‘An Introduction to the Urhobo,’ 17). *Orhan* is worshipped by individuals while the *Edjo* is worshipped by families and communities. According to M. Y. Nabofa, an *Orhan* or an ancestral cult may develop to *edjo* over time (Sees Micheal Y. Nabofa, ‘Urhobo Art and Religious Belief,’ in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal in Urhobo Art*, ed. Perkins Foss, 37–45: 38. The *igbe* religion ‘is the most popular

for blessings from deities and ancestors. Thus the cult of the *ẹsemọ* becomes central to Urhobo religion because it permeates all other forms of religion. Such prominent placement of *ẹsemọ* worship also gives to the funeral ceremonies their relevance among the Urhobo. The rites are performed to satisfy the ancestors and to make them receive the deceased into their guild. Apart from its influence on religion and occupation, the Urhobo location in the hinterland of Niger Delta also provides a unique interdependent relationship with their Itsekiri neighbours in the coastal region.⁴⁷¹

4.7 Urhobo Attachment to Traditions

For the sake of maintaining the cultural identity and spiritual well being of its members, some Urhobo sub-cultures instituted their own set of totems and associated taboos, the observance of which is binding in their communities. The power of totems instituted by the Orogun-Urhobo, even over its members who are Christians is remarkable.⁴⁷² In his work, on ‘Totemism in Orogun,’ Otite argued that the monitor lizard totem plays a solidarity function in the ‘tripartite relationship’ between the Orogun people, *erose* (their deity), and the monitor lizard (their totem). Otite emphasised that, ‘to threaten the monitor lizard is to undermine the position of *erose* and the Orogun people, for they have a more or less collective existence.’⁴⁷³ Other Urhobo sub-cultures have similar system of totems which is an example of their attachment to tradition and culture.

indigenous religious sect among the Urhobo.’ See Micheal Y. Nabofa, ‘Igbe Ubiesha: An Indigenous Charismatic Movement of the People,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 300–371: 300.

⁴⁷¹ Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, xvii, 30–31.

⁴⁷² Onigu Otite, ‘Totemism in Orogun’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 279–287: 286.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 285.

Language is a part of culture and the young Urhobo people are fast losing their grip of their mother tongue,⁴⁷⁴ However, the Urhobo people are proud of their other traditions and persistently hold on to them. Such valued traditions include the *igwe* ('genuflecting') which is the greeting practice of saying *migwo* ('I am bending my knees')⁴⁷⁵ to the elders, the *uyovwi-echio* ('tradition of welcoming visitors'), the practice of wearing their traditional dress, and the interest in their traditional staple food, *usi* ('prepared starch') and *oghwevwri* ('oil soup'). The brief explanation below clarifies the first two which are *igwe* and *uyovwi-echio*.

The *igwe* is an act of reverence for elders⁴⁷⁶ and is cherished among the Urhobo. The elders love to hear it and their hearts bless whoever offers it to them. They do not take kindly to a young person saluting them in English, saying 'Good morning Sir' or 'Good morning Ma' like *igwe* ('genuflecting' and its accompanied saying of *migwo*). The respect for Urhobo elders is such a serious matter to the extent that whoever is found guilty of insulting or assaulting an elder (like causing an elder to fall) can be fined a goat and drink. It is worthy of mention that this phenomenon made the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) (CON/AC) leaders in Urhobo Land advise their members not to demand *igwe* from their pastors (irrespective of the pastor's age).⁴⁷⁷ The reason is that

⁴⁷⁴Urhobo Progress Union recognises, addresses and devotes a section of her important programme to this issue under the title, 'Development of Urhobo Language and Culture,' and states, 'A people without a language and culture is dead. Our culture, particularly our language is under severe threat. A determined approach to uphold the development of our culture and language is on hand' (See 'Urhobo Progressive Union, Programme for launching of Urhobo Development Fund' (2002), 11).

⁴⁷⁵ This way of greeting is called *igwe* ('to genuflect'). It is highly cherished among the Urhobo. It is demanded if one fails to say it. It is regarded as an insult and assault if the younger refuses to say it to the elder and regarded as a taboo or even a curse if the elder mistakenly says it to the younger. It has become a means of identifying seniority and asserting authority.

⁴⁷⁶ Otite, 'Urhobo Identity,' 257.

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with Venerable Victor O. Onosemuode, 31 July 2012. Onosemuode served twice at St. Luke's Anglican Church, Sapele (1989–1992; 1999–2006). He is the current Principal of Adam Igbudu Christian Centre (AICC), Emevor, Isoko from 2011. At this center, Anglican Catechists are trained.

the pastors by virtue of their calling and office are to be respected. The same kind of special treatment is accorded the Urhobo *ivie* ('kings')⁴⁷⁸ and the *irerhe* ('priests') of the Urhobo traditional religions. The Urhobo respect for their elders is a contributing factor towards their respect for the ancestors because ancestors are regarded as family and community elders. They are elders in life and in death having gone ahead to the great beyond.

Closely related to the issue of *igwe* salutation is the *uyovwi-echio* ('tradition of welcoming visitors') during special occasions. The act of *uyovwi-echio* is to place some cola nuts (*cola acuminata*), 'a symbolic instrument for peace, conflict resolution and harmony,'⁴⁷⁹ in a saucer by the host and to support (known as 'wedge') it with an amount of money according to the host's financial strength. Then the relations and friends, who may be around, would join with their own monetary contributions as a way of identifying with the host. The *uyovwi-echio* is an Urhobo unique tradition which the people hold in high esteem. It may simply be called *eghor* ('entertainment') in every day practice of welcoming friends and acquaintances.

The *uyovwi-echio* has become a major item of event in Urhobo ceremonies like marriages and burials. During marriages, the in-laws normally reciprocate with *akewemekwe* ('returned gesture')⁴⁸⁰ but popularly called *oganoso* ('patching road'),⁴⁸¹ an

⁴⁷⁸ Onosemuode supported the Anglican position with Urhobo saying that *evwie ovie ga* ('you born a king to serve him'). He explained further that since the most affectionate response to *migwo* is *frendo, omo me* ('rise up, my child'), it sounds odd for a church member to so address a priest who is regarded as a spiritual father.

⁴⁷⁹ Alozie Bright Chiazam, 'The Kolanut as a Peace Symbol in Igboland: Towards a Cultural Nexus of Gender Construction and Meaning,' A paper presented at the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN), South-East Zonal Conference, held at the law auditorium Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki September 11th to 14th, 2011.

⁴⁸⁰ Respondent 23.

⁴⁸¹ Respondent 5.

expression borrowed from *Ukwani*, the Urhobo north-eastern ethnic neighbours. The *uyovwi-echio* is also performed with sense of dignity and feelings of satisfaction at government functions and church ceremonies among the Urhobo. Again, the Urhobo concept of decent welcome for visitors as reflected in *uyovwi-echio* transcends earthly relationship to their view of the deceased as a visitor to the spiritual world. Thus they try to do all that may be necessary for the ‘new visitor’ to receive a warm welcome by the company of *esemo*, who were already there, lest the deceased becomes *erhierhi r’osuosuo* (‘a wandering spirit’). Details on *erhierhi r’osuosuo* are presented in chapter seven, section 7.2.8.

The practice of *uyovwi-echio* has become a unique mark of Urhobo identity at home and abroad. It rekindles their love for their tradition and culture. It unites all the Urhobo irrespective of sub-cultural unit of origin and provides the avenue for socio-cultural fellowship for Urhobo people, especially those outside their home land. In another word, it creates a feeling of home away from home.

CHAPTER FIVE–RITES OF PASSAGE AMONG THE URHOBO

This chapter introduces the rites of passage anthropological theorists like Arnold van Gennep, Elliot Dismore Chapple, Carleton Stevens Coon and Victor W. Turner and some academic discussions on the subject within NBC and Urhobo Land. It then examines Urhobo rite of *opha* ('circumcision')⁴⁸² and its similarities with that of *erhuerhe* ('burial' or funeral) especially in relation to the veneration of ancestors as outlined in section 5.4, and to have a broader understanding of the nature of Urhobo rites of passage. The chapter concludes with the debate on ancestor veneration or worship in order to locate where Urhobo funeral practice falls.

5.1 Introduction: Rites of Passage Theorists

Rites of passage means the combination of all the routine cultural and religious activities that people carry out for themselves and for others as they or their relation pass from one stage of life to another. This study however is about Urhobo funeral rite which focuses on the passage from *akpo* to *erivwin* through the gate of death. As indicated in chapter three, section 3.5, Arnold van Gennep identified the three-phase pattern of separation, transition and incorporation that characterised every ceremony or rites of passage. He noted the uneven development of the phases in ceremonies and the prominence given to the transition phase in funerals rites for both the deceased and the bereaved.⁴⁸³

Elliot Dismore Chapple (1909–2000) and Carleton Stevens Coon (1904–1981), as American anthropologists, when they were in Harvard University in 1942, 'were among

⁴⁸² The *opha* in Urhobo also means 'bride' but is used in this research to mean 'circumcision' as used by John Tokpabere Agberia. See John Tokpabere Agberia, 'Aesthetics and Rituals of the Opha Ceremony among the Urhobo People,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 41, No. 3 (London and New Delhi: Thousand Oaks and Sage Publications, 2006), 249–260: 249.

⁴⁸³ Myerhoff, Camino and Turner, 'Rites of Passage,' 1987: 382; van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, viii, xxiii, 27, 146–165.

the first to note the theoretical significance of Van Gennep's discovery.⁴⁸⁴ They discussed 'his analysis of rites of passage in a framework of equilibrium-maintenance theory, and [...] added a fourth category, "rites of intensification," which had as their main goal the strengthening of group unity.'⁴⁸⁵ Thus they advanced and refined 'classification of rites' and 'restorative' function of ritual behaviours. In common with van Gennep, Chapple and Coon referred to ceremonies around individuals as 'rites of passage' but differed by designating groups' ceremonies as 'rites of intensification' because the rites increased the rates of interaction of group members.⁴⁸⁶ Victor Turner also developed the concept of rites of passage but introduced the 'drama' or 'performative dimensions' and symbolism to the study of rituals in addition to 'the processual dimensions' of van Gennep.⁴⁸⁷ With Ndembu rituals as his case study, Turner classified rituals broadly into two, namely, 'Life-crisis rituals' and 'Rituals of affliction.' The former which includes rites such as birth, puberty, or death marks the transition from one phase in the development of a person to another while the latter is 'performed for individuals who are said to have been "caught" by the spirits of deceased relatives whom they have forgotten or neglected.'⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁴ Victor Turner, 'Process, System and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis,' *Daedalus* 106, no. 3, *Discoveries and Interpretations: Studies in Contemporary Scholarship* 1 (Summer, 1977), 61–80: 67.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ Elliot Dismore Chapple and Carleton Stevens Coon, *Principles of Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1942), 398.

⁴⁸⁷ Peter L. McLaren, 'A Tribute to Victor Turner (1920–1983), *Anthropologia, New Series* 27, no. 1/2, Victor Turner: Un Hommage Canadien/A Canadian Tribute (Canadian Anthropology Society, 1985), 17–22: 17–18. Victor Turner confirmed this approach by stating in *The Drums of Affliction*, that he approached the performances of rites in terms of 'social field,' 'process,' 'situation,' 'social drama,' and 'conflict' in chapters four and five but 'as concatenations of symbols and systems of values, beliefs and meanings' in chapters seven and eight (See Victor W. Turner, *The Drums of Affliction: A study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1981), 26).

⁴⁸⁸ Mathieu Deflem, 'Ritual, Anti-Structure and Religion: A Discussion of Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 1 (Blackwell Publishing, March 1991), 1–25: 8 (See Turner, *The Drums of Affliction*, 15–16).

Similar to van Gennep's view, Turner equally identified three stages in the rites of passage but paid much attention to the transitional stage which he called the 'liminal period' and 'communitas' and in which the ritual subjects are 'betwixt and between.'⁴⁸⁹ His kin interest in the middle rites of passage may have arisen from his own life 'crossroads.'⁴⁹⁰ Mathieu Deflem⁴⁹¹ observed that although Turner recognised the presence of ritual in the modern societies, he understood them as having different characteristics from those of the tribal societies. Turner applied his findings from Ndembu ritual study to the modern and industrial societies. He used the term 'liminoid' for the modern societies which regarded religion as 'part of the division of social labour,' separated from the 'economic, political, domestic and recreational life' but the term 'liminal period' for the tribal societies where life is wholly religious, 'pervaded with invisible influences.'⁴⁹²

Deflem however critiqued Turner of ambiguity for using the same term, 'ritual' for both tribal and modern societies. He argued that the use of 'ceremony' for secular societies by Max Gluckman (1911–1975)⁴⁹³ was a better option.⁴⁹⁴ Deflem also noticed the contribution of Dame Mary Douglas (1921–2007), another British social

⁴⁸⁹ Deflem, 'Ritual, Anti-Structure and Religion,' 13–15 (See Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 1969, 94–97, 125–130).

⁴⁹⁰ Turner experienced divorced parents as a child and lived with his maternal grandmother. He developed interest in science through his father who was an electronic engineer and in arts through the mother, an actress. He did not like military service but 'became a non-combatant bomb disposal soldier in 1943. He studied anthropology to be able to combine scientific and art studies in equilibrium (See Deflem, 'Ritual, Anti-Structure and Religion,' 1–2).

⁴⁹¹ Mathieu Deflem is a Professor of sociology the University of South Carolina, Columbia, USA.

⁴⁹² Deflem, 'Ritual, Anti-Structure and Religion,' 17

⁴⁹³ Gluckman was a South African and British social anthropologist and tutor to Victor Turner. See Michael D. Murphy et. al.. 'The Manchester School,' *Anthropological Theories* (The University of Alabama: Department of Anthropology), available from [http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Manchester School](http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Manchester%20School), Internet, accessed 19 February 2012.

⁴⁹⁴ Deflem, 'Ritual, Anti-Structure and Religion,' 17.

anthropologist,⁴⁹⁵ that there are secular rituals, though may be few, in tribal societies as well, thus one can study rituals in socio-cultural environment without reference to the supernatural.⁴⁹⁶ In other words, Deflem agreed with Gluckman on the use of ‘ritual’ and ‘ceremony,’ to distinguish the religious rites from the secular while Douglas supported Turner’s method of understanding both as rituals but of different approach.

For the purpose of this research, it is important to clarify that in both NBC and Urhobo culture, life consists of the sacred and the secular and the two are intrinsically interwoven. The Urbobo Baptists however preferred the words ‘funeral service’ or ‘burial ceremony’ to ‘burial rites’ or ‘ritual’ while in the traditional setting, ‘burial custom’ is a familiar term. Nevertheless, this research uses the words like ‘rites,’ ‘ritual,’ ‘ceremony’ or ‘custom’ interchangeably.

Three NBC scholars, namely Osadolor Imasogie, B. Uche Enyioha, and S. Ademola Ishola have expatiated on rites of passage from different perspectives. Although they used generalised terms like ‘African,’⁴⁹⁷ ‘Christian community’⁴⁹⁸ and ‘African community,’⁴⁹⁹ their immediate audience were the NBC and the wider Nigerian society. Therefore the implications of their thoughts for the Nigerian Baptists cannot be overemphasised. Imasogie defined the rites of passage ‘as a ritual dramatization of the interplay of biology and culture on human destiny on the one hand, and the African’s perceived mysterious symbiotic interaction between his temporal and spiritual existence

⁴⁹⁵ Richard Fardon, ‘Obituary: Dame Mary Douglas,’ *The Guardian* (Friday 18 May 2007), available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2007/may/18/guardianobituaries.obituaries>, Internet, accessed 19 February 2012.

⁴⁹⁶ Deflem, ‘Ritual, Anti-Structure and Religion,’ 17–18.

⁴⁹⁷ Osadolor Imasogie, ‘The Nature of Rites of Passage in African Traditional Religion,’ *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology (OJOT)*, No. 7, 13–17 (December 1992): 13.

⁴⁹⁸ B. Uche Enyioha, ‘The Pastoral Significance of Traditional African Concept of Rites of Passage,’ *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology (OJOT)*, No. 7, 18–25 (December 1992): 18.

⁴⁹⁹ S. Ademola Ishola, ‘The Sociological Significance of the Traditional African concept of Rites of Passage,’ *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology (OJOT)*, No. 7, 26–32 (December 1992): 30–31.

on the other hand.⁵⁰⁰ Imasogie's definition underpins the African's recognition of spiritual realities in the stages of life and the role of religious rituals on those realities. In exploring the nature of the rites, he focused on the essence, functions, essential qualities or characteristics of the rites of passage among Africans and identified four major characteristics. First is the three-fold pattern of separation, transition and re-incorporation, which agrees with van Gennep's theory. The second is the symbolization of the rites for ritual renewal. The third is the theme of unbroken relationship between the secular and the sacred and lastly, the rites symbolize identity and continuity.⁵⁰¹ In other words, rites of passage re-enact in Africans the sense of rebirth, affiliation with the sacred, identity and continuity. In line with Turner's approach, Imasogie understood rites as symbols and thus demonstrated the eclectic nature of his theory.

B. Uche Enyioha examined the nature of pastoral ministry to members who are passing through the crisis of the rites of passage. He understood that the existing cultural practices in these periods are a reaffirmation of the people's communal covenant and a reflection upon their history, values, cosmology and religious philosophy.⁵⁰² He explained further that because of the crisis, the people are open to pastoral support and education.⁵⁰³ Enyioha was of the opinion that the contextual approach of a Christian minister in such moments can create a meaningful bridge between African cultural values and the Christian faith.⁵⁰⁴ He thus argued that an effective pastor should utilize Christian rites and ceremonies for meeting basic support needs and facilitating the total

⁵⁰⁰ Imasogie, 'The Nature of Rites of Passage in African Traditional Religion,' 13.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 14–16.

⁵⁰² Enyioha, 'The Pastoral Significance of Traditional African Concept of Rites of Passage,' 18.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 18–19.

welfare of church members.⁵⁰⁵ Enyioha also advocated that Christian rites should not be oblivious of people's cultural values.⁵⁰⁶ S. Ademola Ishola focused on the sociological significance of the Yorùbá rites of passage and argued that rituals of death are societal and have psycho-socio functions. Funeral rituals in particular 'serve double purposes—the final, fitting send-off of the deceased to the spiritual world, and the renewal and strengthening of the bond of family ties.'⁵⁰⁷ In order to understand Urhobo rites of passage, the *opha* ('circumcision') shall be considered along with funeral rites.

5.2 The *opha* ('circumcision')

Agberia has studied the significance of *opha* ceremony of the Ughievwen-Urhobo and Udu-Urhobo.⁵⁰⁸ The *opha* refers to the rite of circumcision for both boys and girls. The rite is however more elaborated for girls among the Urhobo which accounts for Agberia's dominant use of its feminine terminology, *emetẹ-yanvwọ* ('excision of clitorises')⁵⁰⁹ or female circumcision. The *opha* rite introduces the girls and the boys into adulthood,⁵¹⁰ the stage of responsibility and entrenches 'the tradition of the age grade social system' among the Urhobo⁵¹¹ (*omọtẹ* (a girl) to *adje* (a woman) and *omoshare* (a boy) to *oshare* (a man)).

In Idjerhe, an interview respondent explained that 'male children are circumcised on the eighth day while the females must wait till age of twelve or thirteen or when they are

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ishola, 'The Sociological Significance of the Traditional African concept of Rites of Passage,' 30.

⁵⁰⁸ Agberia, 'Aesthetics and Rituals of the Opha ceremony among the Urhobo people,' 250.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 250, and 252.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 249.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 250.

betrothed.⁵¹² He clarified further that the timing is in such a way that the girl is crossing from youth hood to adulthood while the boy most times still remains an eight-day child. Hence *opha* rite attracts more pomp and pageantry when performed for girls than boys.⁵¹³ The same respondent mentioned that Idjerhe has different expressions for the circumcision of the two genders, such as *oyanvwe omote* for a girl and *oyanvwe omoshare* ('excision of foreskin') for a boy. He said *oyanvwe omote* is delayed in Idjerhe because the people believe that clitoris may re grow if excised too early.⁵¹⁴ He highlighted further that the term *opha* also means 'precious, matured lady,' 'puberty' or 'bride,' hence the girls are treated as queens with attendants during the ceremony. The celebrant is kept in a fattening room for a season, robed with local red cam wood lotion and exposed almost naked to parade her beauty and maturity to her (or would-be) suitor.⁵¹⁵

According to Agberia, Urhobo rituals of rites of passage are rich in aesthetics and symbolism. They are also useful for socio-cultural and recuperative functions.⁵¹⁶ The concept of radiant beauty in Urhobo consists of life qualities such as 'virtuosity, hard work, discipline, and respect for elders'⁵¹⁷ which the people regard as inner beauty. Therefore, the emphasis of beauty is not solely on the outward appearance though important. Hence, to the Urhobo, *opha's* inner virtues in terms of responsible spirit, patience, industry, and respect enhance the outer beauty. Consequently, *opha* celebrants are trained and tested for patience and ability to bear pain in childbearing or in life

⁵¹² Respondent 5.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Agberia, 'Aesthetics and Rituals of the Opha ceremony among the Urhobo people,' 250.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

generally with circumcision being a painful experience as an instrument. Nevertheless, the *ophā* celebrants are supplied adequate ‘nutritious food,’⁵¹⁸ rest and traditional ‘red cam wood’ lotion⁵¹⁹ to nurture their skin beauty as well.

Tanure Ojaide (1948–), a renowned Urhobo poet also studied the concept of ‘Ugliness as Beauty’ in Urhobo Art and confirmed the Urhobo ‘preference for internal beauty of character rather than the superficial beauty of the skin.’⁵²⁰ Similarly, Erivwo observed that the beauty of character far above the physical beauty is what endears a woman to an Urhobo man, citing Urhobo sayings like *uruemu arovwon, ọdi erhuvwu* (‘it is character that one marries, not beauty’)⁵²¹ and *uruemu ohwo* (‘character makes a person’).⁵²² In summary, it is vital to note that the Urhobo rites of *ophā* serves educative purposes as well, instilling morality and responsibility in the younger generations. In other words, *ophā* rite has emotional, educational, relational, spiritual and other socio-cultural functions among Urhobo. It also serves as an avenue for Urhobo art and cultural display. Funeral rites serve similar purposes.

5.3 The *erhuẹrhe* (‘burial’ or funeral)

Funeral institution is well developed among the Urhobo. Nabofa,⁵²³ Erhueh⁵²⁴ and Adogbo⁵²⁵ identified Urhobo belief in ‘cyclic’ life pattern, rotating from *akpo* to *erivwin*

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁵²⁰ Tanure Ojaide, ‘How the Urhobo People See the World through Art,’ in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal Urhobo Art*, 78.

⁵²¹ Samuel U. Erivwo, ‘Urhobo Traditional Beliefs and Values,’ 214.

⁵²² Ibid., 216.

⁵²³ M. Y. Nabofa, ‘Reincarnation: The Doctrine of Heredity and Hope in Urhobo Culture,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 288–298: 288.

⁵²⁴ Anthony O. Erhueh, ‘Image of God in man: Dialogue between Christianity and Urhobo Traditional Religion,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 227–287: 235, 239.

and back to *akpo*⁵²⁶ continuously without end. Funeral rites are important to the Urhobo because they believe that the ‘elaborate burial rites’ for a person who must ‘have lived well’ and ‘died well,’ procures for him or her a blissful abode among the *eṣemo*,⁵²⁷ and also qualifies him or her for re-incarnation into the family.⁵²⁸ Adogbo stated that,

The position of an individual [in *erivwin*] depends on how well he had lived in the physical world. Those who lived good life, free of sins, died at old age and are given appropriate funeral rites, occupy prominent positions in the land of the dead. On the other hand, those who are evil are banished from the spirit world to the ‘bad bush’ [*aghwa rode*] where they live a frustrated and restless life. They become malignant spirits who are responsible for some of the calamities (such as epidemics, drought etc.) of the living.⁵²⁹

The above quotation shows that, in Urhobo understanding, a person who lived well and long still needed an ‘appropriate funeral rites’ to enter rest. Since it is expected as cultural role of children to work in the best interest of their parents, every Urhobo person therefore desires to have responsible child (*ren*). Moreso, only the biological children are allowed to slaughter *ḗvwe ehun* by Urhobo tradition and this practice heightens the significance of children in Urhobo community and in its burial rites.

The metaphor of ‘going home’⁵³⁰ for death is commonly used among the Urhobo. Therefore death is treated as a journey to a far place, *erivwin*, and the funeral process becomes the act of equipping the deceased for the journey. This concept serves as the reason for the show of solidarity by the extended family and the community through rituals. Ilega explained the food sacrifice in Urhobo funerals as food offered for the

⁵²⁵ Adogbo, ‘The Signification of Rituals of Destiny among the Urhobo,’ 83–84.

⁵²⁶ Nabofa, ‘Reincarnation,’ 293.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁵²⁹ Adogbo, ‘The Signification of Rituals of Destiny among the Urhobo,’ 83–84.

⁵³⁰ Nabofa, ‘Reincarnation: The Doctrine of Heredity and Hope in Urhobo Culture,’ 290.

journey.⁵³¹ Consequently the commiserating community creates the atmosphere of togetherness between the dead and the living;⁵³² the presence of the deceased with the guild of *ẹṣẹmọ* on one the hand and with the community on the other hand. The Urhobo people believe that the deceased is happy to see the crowd that gather on his/her behalf and with the family in time of bereavement. In this scenario, only the deceased and *obuepha* ('medicine men') are capable of seeing *erivwin* and *akpọ* at the same time. Since this research is on funeral rites, other details are reserved for Chapters 7–9, but it is important to identify the findings of the scholars thus considered on the Nigerian and Urhobo rites of passage.

It is obvious from the contributions of Imasogie, Enyioha, Ishola and Agberia, that they agreed with earlier anthropological theorists like van Gennep and Turner on rites of passage in the following ways. One, rites of passage is a journey-like process. The *ọpha* transports a boy or a girl to adulthood, while *ẹrhuerhe* ('burial') aids the deceased as he or she travels from *akpọ* and *erivwin*. Two, it has three phases of separation, transition, and reintegration. Urhobo rites of *ọpha* and *ẹrhuerhe* are usually in two stages. The *ọpha* consists of *omote eyanvwo* and *eki-eruo* ('bridal procession, into market')⁵³³ while the funeral comprises of *ebrovwiotor* and *ẹrhuerhe*.⁵³⁴ The two stages point to the separation and integration phases in rites of passage respectively. For instance, *ọpha* separates from childhood experiences and joins the adult life. In like manner, the deceased leaves the earthly family for the company of the ancestors and simultaneously, the bereaved change their position from before and after the demise. Between the starting point and

⁵³¹ Ilega, *Gideon M. Urhobo and the God's Kingdom Society in Nigeria*, 13.

⁵³² Nabofa, 'Reincarnation: The Doctrine of Heredity and Hope in Urhobo Culture,' 291.

⁵³³ Agberia, 'Aesthetics and Rituals of the Opha Ceremony among the Urhobo People,' 252–254.

⁵³⁴ Queen Okoroleju, 'Traditional Burials and their Problems in Agbarha Sub-Cultural Unit' (B. A. Long essay, Delta State University, Abraka, 2000), 21.

the destination is the transitional phase called 'liminal period' and 'communitas' by Turner. The second stage in each of the rites is expensive and could be postponed until the people are much financially capable.⁵³⁵

Three, the rituals of Urhobo rites of passage fit Victor Turner's description of ritual as 'an aggregation of symbols,'⁵³⁶ which are 'storage units' of 'maximum amount of information.'⁵³⁷ The symbols could be in form of 'sacred articles (relics, masks, instruments, "what is shown,"), actions (dancing, "what is done") and instructions (mythical history, "what is said"),⁵³⁸ and these symbols point to spiritual realities. For instance, in Urhobo funeral, *ihurhe* is a sacred article representing the ancestor. Expressions like *o kporo re jega* ('he has gone to unforbidden land'), *o kpo re* ('he has gone home'), or *o vwerhe* ('he has slept') do not carry literal meanings but symbolic that the person under reference has died. The absence of crying, or announcement by word or conduct until certain things are done during the demise of a king are also symbolic actions with a message that king is superhuman.⁵³⁹ Bruce Onobrakpeya (1932–) also explained certain colour symbols in Urhobo funeral rites. He emphasised the generous use of 'white' clour to symbolise celebration of a fulfilled life and a wish of smooth voyage for the deceased.⁵⁴⁰ The items in white colour during Urhobo funeral rites include the *omoshare r'okpako's* dress, the *okpo oyibo* with which the deceased is

⁵³⁵ Agberia, 'Aesthetics and Rituals of the Opha Ceremony among the Urhobo People,' 251.

⁵³⁶ Turner, *The Drums of Affliction*, 2.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵³⁸ Turner, *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 99f.

⁵³⁹ Respondent 5.

⁵⁴⁰ Bruce Onobrakpeya, 'Color Symbolism in Urhobo Art,' in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal Urhobo Art*, ed. Perkins Foss, 95–99: 97.

wrapped, the ‘yellowish,’ (almost white) palm fronds and the *orhe* (‘white river bank chalk’) used to worship the ancestors and other deities.⁵⁴¹

Others factors emphasised by Nigerian and Urhobo scholars include integration within and between the physical and spiritual realms of existence. The *opha* reinforces the Urhobo ‘tradition of age grade social system’ and promotes community wellbeing and functionality. The *erhuerhe* also provides the link between *akpo* and *erivwin*, the living and the dead, the natural and supernatural, and thus creates a sense of continuity instead of an abrupt end. In other words, Urhobo funeral rituals unite the deceased and the ancestors on one hand, and integrate the bereaved into the rest members of the family and the community on the other hand. The *ebrovwiotor* is the rite of separation while *erhuere* is the rite of integration for the deceased without which there is danger for both the dead and the living because ‘the ghost of the deceased, unable to gain admission into the community of the departed [...] may haunt the family.’⁵⁴² It is dangerous for the dead because not being ‘incorporated into the ancestral spirit-community, he [or she] becomes a ghost [which] is to be cut off from [his or her] family [and] cannot be invoked at the ancestral shrine.’⁵⁴³ Here lies the difference with the Nigerian Baptist funeral rites with its focus only on the bereaved, not the deceased and on the rites of separation not incorporation for the deceased. The Urhobo rites care for both the bereaved and the deceased passing through all the three stages of separation, transition and reintegration. And it is important to note that the bereaved are spiritually and emotionally at peace when they have the assurance that the ritual needs of their departed member(s) are adequately met. The Nigerian Baptist explanation is that ‘when a person dies, his opportunity to exist here on earth comes to an end but his life continues in

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Imasogie, *African Traditional Religion*, 63.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 65.

another world in a status consigned to him by God based on the life he lived on earth.⁵⁴⁴ Having examined Urhobo *opha* and *erhuerhe* separately, it is proper to enumerate their meeting points.

5.4 The Relationship between the Urhobo Rites of *opha* and *erhuerhe*

Both *opha* and *erhuerhe* rites are Urhobo socio-cultural events which attract the participation of the extended family, ‘the entire village and the neighbouring communities.’⁵⁴⁵ The society performs solidarity in both cases. The *opha* celebrant is cheered up by the company of the peer group and their ‘masquerade performances’⁵⁴⁶ and the bereaved are consoled by the sympathisers. Thus the recuperative function of *opha* ritual is like the psychological function of the funeral rites. In *opha* rite, ‘nutritious food is served while children’s masquerade performances are held [...] to keep the boy [or the girl] cheerful, happy and healthy after going through the rigours of heavy blood loss through the excision.’⁵⁴⁷ In like manner, during funerals, the extended family and the community pay close attention to the emotional needs of the bereaved according to the degree of their bereavement, starting with the spouse and the children who have suffered from emotional exhaustion.

Another feature common to *opha* and *erhuerhe* rites is that of sense of loss. In *opha* rites, the ‘peers lament’ the loss of a person from their social group. In funerals, the bereaved laments the loss of the deceased from *akpo* to *erivwin*. Both ceremonies however have the cultural provision of a feeling of gain as well. For instance, the

⁵⁴⁴ Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, 18.

⁵⁴⁵ Agberia, ‘Aesthetics and Rituals of the Opha Ceremony among the Urhobo People,’ 254.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

number in the adult social group increases by *ophā* rite while the ancestors are regarded to have also increased in number when prescribed funeral rituals are performed. This point graphically illustrates the phases of separation and incorporation in rites of passage.

There is also a symbolic use of number ‘three’ during the ceremonies. In *ophā*, there is a threefold request by the suitor for the rites to be performed. The *oya’emete* (‘the circumciser’s’) also uses *emareṅ* (smashed yam) with recitations to make sign of circle around *ophā*’s head three times.⁵⁴⁸ In funerals as well, there is a threefold report by the deceased children to the *orua* (‘extended family’) before the permission for burial is granted. The *epha*’s (plural) cleansing on the third day⁵⁴⁹ and the performance of burials for three days are all indications of the sacred nature of the number ‘three’ to the Urhobo people. Other common features to Urhobo *ophā* and funeral rites are the use of yam, special treatment and seclusion of the celebrant(s), and occasional gun shots.⁵⁵⁰ The special role of the suitor⁵⁵¹ in *ophā* and the in-law in funeral is phenomenal, while both ceremonies have outing⁵⁵² which incorporate them into the next phase of life.

The two ceremonies are further related in their connection with the ancestors. The *ophā* rite is partly to please the ancestors because the uncircumcised woman is violation of the ancestors.⁵⁵³ During the rite, the celebrating community drives away the evil spirits

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 254.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 255–256..

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 252–253.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 254.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 256.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 251.

known as *oje* and invoke the spirits of the ancestors.⁵⁵⁴ In *erhuṛhe* also, the deceased is believed to receive the warm reception of the ancestors. Reference to the ancestors is not left out of the childbirth rites too because the newborn babies are seen as gifts from the ancestors, In summary, Urhobo *ophā* ('circumcision') and *erhuṛhe* ('funeral') rites are socio-cultural, psycho-spiritual, and symbolic rituals performed, they restore orderliness in crisis situation created by growth and death respectively. The two rites employ the creation of equilibrium between the senses of loss and gain. They conform to the usual pattern of separation, transition and incorporation, and focus on the ancestors as unseen but just moderators.

5.5 Ancestor Veneration/Worship

The focus in this section is to engage in the debate on whether Urhobo *iye ẹgọ* ('serving the ancestors') amounts to veneration or worship. These terms, 'worship' and 'veneration,' are often treated as synonyms,⁵⁵⁵ or if any dividing line, 'is often only a hair's breadth.'⁵⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the debate around ancestor worship and veneration within the discipline of African Traditional Religion has elicited two main positions. The principal views are that the ancestors are worshipped or that they are venerated, not worshipped. However, between the two poles are other modifications. Firstly, that the ancestors are worshipped but at a lesser level compared to other divinities and/or Supreme Being. Secondly, that they could be worshipped, venerated, or even scolded, depending on how the living has benefited from their care.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 255.

⁵⁵⁵ *Oxford Thesaurus of English*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), s.v. 'veneration,' 947; and 'worship,' 981.

⁵⁵⁶ Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, 180.

Osadalor Imasogie,⁵⁵⁷ K. A. Busia,⁵⁵⁸ E. Geoffrey Parrinder⁵⁵⁹ and other scholars argued that ancestors are worshipped as they are equated with other divinities. Diakparomre also illustrated Urhobo cosmology with an isosceles triangle having *edjo* (nature spirits) on one side and *esemo/iniemo* (ancestor spirits) on the other side. The *Oghene* (Supreme Being) is located at the apex of the triangle with human beings at the base.⁵⁶⁰ On the other side of the debate are others like John S. Mbiti,⁵⁶¹ Edward W. Fasholé-Luke,⁵⁶² Erhueh,⁵⁶³ J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu⁵⁶⁴ who maintained the view that ancestors are venerated and not worshipped. Awolalu and Dopamu gave the four reasons as their bases for understanding respect for ancestors as veneration instead of worship. First, there are no priests or priestesses for ancestor veneration as for other divinities except the head of each family who officiates at the household shrines. This argument is not strong enough because the source of priests, whether from inside or outside the family, does not change worship to non worship or vice-versa. Among the Urhobo, the first child of the family is always the priest to coordinate the rituals; son for male ancestors and daughter for female ancestors.⁵⁶⁵ The second reason by Awolalu and Dopamu is that there is no image for ancestors as for other divinities. This point too could not stand for Idjerhe-Urhobo who have *ihurhe* as image for *esemo* and which will be discussed in detail in Chapter seven, subsection 7.2.4. Thirdly, Awolalu and Dopamu stated that ancestors are still regarded as members of the family while divinities are not.

⁵⁵⁷ Imasogie, *African Traditional Religion*, 53–55, 62–63.

⁵⁵⁸ K. A. Busia, 'The Ashanti,' in *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, ed. Daryll Forde, 190–209 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for International African Institute, 1954), 203–204.

⁵⁵⁹ E. Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yorùbá, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), 115–127.

⁵⁶⁰ Diakparomre, 'Symbolism in Urhobo Masks and Mask Performances,' 471.

⁵⁶¹ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 16.

⁵⁶² Fasholé-Luke, 'Ancestor Veneration and the Communion of Saints,' 211–212.

⁵⁶³ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 265.

⁵⁶⁴ J. Omosade Awolalu and Adelumo P. Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonjo Press, 1979), 274–275.

⁵⁶⁵ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 267–268.

And lastly, that the area of coverage of ancestors' spirits is limited to their family unlike the divinities whose influence can cover a whole ethnic group. The last reason based on the scope of worshippers is equally weak as worship does not depend on number.

Among Urhobo Scholars, Erhueh carefully avoided the term, 'worship' but used 'veneration' in Urhobo dealing with their ancestors because he viewed the Urhobo practice of homage to ancestors and *erhuerhe* ('second burial') as demonstration of *oghọ-emuo* ('respect') rather than *egagọ* ('worship or adoration') to parents—the *esemọ* and *iniemo* ('female ancestors') who continued to live bodily in *erivwin* after death.⁵⁶⁶ For instance, they bury their dead in their homes—inside a room or a parlour and offer foods and drinks to the spirits of the ancestors. The family head also speak to and seek the ancestors' blessing and permission before any major event.⁵⁶⁷ He argued further that the Urhobo' approach to the *esemọ* does not negate the existence of *Oghene* ('Supreme Being') as the all powerful and the creator of the universe⁵⁶⁸ whom they worship.

Erhueh, like Bolaji Idowu (1913–1993), thought that the attitude of homage to ancestors is not limited to the Urhobo or the Africans but existed in other continents of the world including Europe and Asia.⁵⁶⁹ His argument is similar to that of Igor Kopytoff concerning the Suku people of Zaire. Kopytoff observed that the Suku have no equivalent word for ancestors, they address their dead as *bambutu* ('ruling elders' of a lineage dead or alive),⁵⁷⁰ simply as juniors will do to their living seniors. It is therefore

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 265–266.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 266–267

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 261–262.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 266; E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1973), 177.

⁵⁷⁰ Igor Kopytoff, 'Ancestors as Elders in Africa,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 41, no. 2 (April 1971), 129–142: 131.

an act of courtesy and respect and not worship as the used words ‘typically combine complaints, scolding, sometimes even anger, and at the same time appeal for forgiveness.’⁵⁷¹ Kopytoff and Erhueh may however be oversimplifying the rites because Kopytoff admitted that the dead *bambutu* ‘are propitiated with sacrifices,’⁵⁷² which I suppose is not the case with the living *bambutu*, and Erhueh also stated that when occasion demands, the Urhobo perform expiatory sacrifices to *Oghene* and to *esemo*.⁵⁷³

Erhueh however recognised that the Urhobo ascribe spiritual power to their *esemo*, being able to guard, guide and monitor the living from *erivwin*. The Urhobo believe that if the *esemo* are pleased with the humans, they could bless with peace, but on the contrary, cause ‘calamities’ which will demand ‘expiatory sacrifices’ to avert.⁵⁷⁴ Meanwhile, it is this view of ascribing spiritual powers to ancestors that other scholars have interpreted as amounting to worship. For instance, Erivwo⁵⁷⁵ and Ilega⁵⁷⁶ do perceive the word *iye ego* (‘serving the ancestors’) as equivalent to *egago*. Erivwo explained that in the course of serving the ancestors, the priest repeatedly says,

Ohwo rago nu (‘the one who is worshipped’)
Omie ree (or, ane oye sivwee) (‘and yet fails to accept the offer or fails to heal’)
Okpe obotafe da ra re (‘should go out and there eat’)
Ohwo rago nu (‘the one who after is worshipped’)
r ‘Osivwe (‘does save or heal’)
Orhie tine rhe re (‘should come here and eat’)⁵⁷⁷

He explained further that *iye ego* (‘ancestors worship’) could be performed as *iye remu* (‘with food’), *iye rudi* (‘with drink’), *iye re evwe* (‘with a goat, usually a she-goat’),⁵⁷⁸ or

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 262.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 267.

⁵⁷⁵ Samuel U. Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 29–30, and 203.

⁵⁷⁶ Ilega, *Gideon M. Urhobo and the God’s Kingdom Society in Nigeria*, 13–14.

⁵⁷⁷ Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 29–30.

all the three aspects combined. Despite his argument that the Urhobo practice ancestor worship however, Eriwo disagreed with what he regarded as interruption of ‘the indigenous culture’ in relation to ancestors⁵⁷⁹ among the Urhobo Anglicans, but suggested the ‘Urhobonisation’⁵⁸⁰ of Christianity and the promotion of reverence for *ẹsemọ* (‘ancestors’), like the memorial services among the Yorùbá, which does not amount to ‘*ẹsemọ* worship.’⁵⁸¹ This thought by Eriwo is similar to that of Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou—the expression of Christian rites culturally among different people⁵⁸² mentioned in chapter two, section 2.1.

Eriwo observed that the Urhobo concepts of immortality, the vicious circle of human beings coming and going, and the impingement of the other dimension of existence beyond death contributed to the initial embrace of Anglican Christianity by the early Urhobo converts.⁵⁸³ By this observation, Eriwo meant that the Urhobo could relate better with Jesus Christ as a Superior Ancestor because of their understanding and value for traditional ancestors. Also because when Jesus Christ died, he came back to life from the realm of death, whereas, none of the traditional ancestors that the Urhobo have known had ever returned in the manner that Christ did. This way of understanding Christ is similar to that of ‘Ancestor-Christology’ of Kwame Bediako (1945–2008).⁵⁸⁴ Bediako postulated that ‘Christ by virtue of his Incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension into the realm of spirit power, can rightly be designated in African terms, as Ancestor, indeed

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 22–23, 29–30, 200, 202 and 203.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁸⁰ ‘Urhobonisation’ is used here as a noun, a derivative of the word Urhobo to mean making the matter under reference, in this case Christianity, indigenous to the Urhobo.

⁵⁸¹ Eriwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 174.

⁵⁸² Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 124.

⁵⁸³ Eriwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 75; Eriwo, ‘Urhobo Traditional Beliefs and Values’, 226.

⁵⁸⁴ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 1995), 217.

Supreme Ancestor.’⁵⁸⁵ He thought however, that ‘once Jesus Christ comes, the (human) ancestors are cut off as means of blessing’ and the African refracted devotions to divinities and ancestors should be refocused on ‘Christ, mediated through the Holy Spirit.’⁵⁸⁶ Roar G. Fotland understood Bediako’s approach as ‘continuity in a new religious (Presbyterian) framework where the old (Akan concept of Ancestor) is interpreted in the light of the new.’⁵⁸⁷

Osume also admitted that the Urhobo worship their ancestors but hierarchically place *Osolobrugue/ Oghene* above the ancestors. Nevertheless, the ancestors are looked upon more than *Oghene* for rectification of both natural and humanly caused problems through moral transgressions. The reason is that the ancestors are perceived to be closer to their living family members than *Oghene* and therefore stand as their advocates before *Oghene*. Despite the Urhobo acknowledgement and worship of *Oghene*, whose shrine they symbolise with *Oghene* pole or *Oghene-egodo* in the centre of the compound, the worship is still routed through the ancestors. The worship of *edjo* as well or any other form of worship is directed through the ancestors.⁵⁸⁸ In support of the incorporation of ancestor worship in the worship of *edjo*, Foss stated that “once, nearly every Urhobo community had one or more shrines that housed *edjo* images commemorating the spirits of their founding families.”⁵⁸⁹ It is however surprising that Foss omitted the word “ancestor” in his treatment of Urhobo religion apart from indicating that “a community founding members” could be the originator of some

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. See also, Roar G. Fotland, ‘Ancestor Christology in Context: Theological Perspectives of Kwame Bediako’ Thesis submitted to University of Bergen (2004), 189–202, 232–237.

⁵⁸⁷ Fotland, ‘Ancestor Christology in Context,’ 400, 402, 405.

⁵⁸⁸ Osume, *Okpe Philosophical Thought*, 81.

⁵⁸⁹ Foss, ‘An Introduction to the Urhobo,’ 17.

edjọ.⁵⁹⁰ He also made reference to “the spirits of their [Urhobo] founding families” as noted above which is certainly pointing to the Urhobo ancestors. Thus Foss recognised the worship of *edjọ* as “central to Urhobo religious thought”⁵⁹¹ but also demonstrated that the worship of *edjọ* and ancestors are interwoven among Urhobo.

Ekeh also observed that the Urhobo feel more obligated to the ancestors and hold them solely “responsible for their fortunes or misfortunes”⁵⁹² until one Ubiesha Etakpor (died 1920) who founded the Urhobo traditional religion of *Igbe* taught his followers about the supremacy of *Ọghẹnẹ* over the ancestors.⁵⁹³ Nabofa clarified how the worship of ancestors by Urhobo is interwoven with their worship of *Ọghẹnẹ*. He stated that “in the remote past,” the Urhobo worship *Ọghẹnẹ* directly without “the divinities, spirits and ancestors” as “intermediaries.” However, the problems of “inter-community [...] wars and conflicts” made the Urhobo to seek protection from powers considered influential within their respective territories.⁵⁹⁴ In other words, Urhobo traditional religion was originally monotheistic hence worship was directed only to *Ọghẹnẹ* before it later devolves into the polytheistic form.⁵⁹⁵ Having taken the polytheistic form, it seems the reverence to ancestors becomes prominent as it cuts across all forms of worship. According to Nabofa, the veneration of ancestors is permitted in some branches of *Igbe* religion as well.⁵⁹⁶ Until the present time, the Urhobo attach great importance to *ẹshe*

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Ekeh, ‘Urhobo World View,’ 31.

⁵⁹³ Ibid. The strand of *Igbe* worship founded by Ubiesha is called *Igbe Ubiesha*, *Igbe Orise*, *Igbe Oweya*, *Igbe Uku* or *Igbe Orhen* (*Igbe* directed to the Supreme Being). Other forms of *Igbe* religion in Urhobo Land include ‘*Igbe Amẹ*, *Igbe Ọghenuku*, *Igbe Everhe* or *Igbe Emeni*’ (See Michael Y. Nabofa, ‘*Igbe Ubiesha: An Indigenous Charismatic Movement of the Urhobo People*,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 300–371: 305, 310–311, 319–320. *Ọghẹnẹ* is also called *Oweya* by *Igbe* adherents (Ibid., 303).

⁵⁹⁴ Nabofa, ‘*Igbe Ubiesha: An Indigenous Charismatic Movement of the Urhobo People*,’ 306.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 306, 326.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 327–328.

(‘ancestors’ shrine’)⁵⁹⁷ and *ephō* (singular *ophō*, ‘ancestors’ sticks’). The *ephō* consist of a collection of special spiritual pieces of wood in the family *eshē*, each representing an ancestor who had been initiated to the world of ancestors. The children may later request for their father's *ophō* and place it in their own residential quarters to initiate a fresh dynasty of ancestral cult.⁵⁹⁸

Writing from the perspective of Edo/Bini, Imasogie did not critique the term ‘ancestor worship’ as practiced by the Edo but explained their belief with three reasons. These reasons include continuity between the dead and the living, the view of the ancestors as the guardian of morality in the family circle, and the power of the ancestors to ward off evil spirits. Among the Edo, the eldest surviving member of the family is usually the priest and seen as ‘the link between the living and the deceased generations.’⁵⁹⁹

It is important to understand ancestor worship and how it differs from veneration. Helen Hardacre (1949–), an American Japanologist is of the view that ‘the rites of death’ falls ‘within the purview of ancestor worship [...] when memorial rites beyond the period of death and disposition of the corpse are carried out as a regular function of a kinship group,’⁶⁰⁰ and when ancestors are imbued with the power and influence of a deity.⁶⁰¹ Hardacre’s distinction is questionable because, while attributing divine power to ancestors may amount to worship, simple memorial rites may not. Daniel Chi-Sung Chen demonstrates with his study of Chinese people that ancestor practices could be for

⁵⁹⁷ Eriwwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 201

⁵⁹⁸ Respondent 23.

⁵⁹⁹ Imasogie, *African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1985), 37–38.

⁶⁰⁰ Helen Hardacre, ‘Ancestor Worship,’ in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1, ed. Mircea Eliade, 263–268: 264. Republished as Helen Hardacre, ‘Ancestor Worship,’ in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1, 2nd ed. Lindsay Jones, 320–325: 321.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*

three different purposes separately or combined—veneration, salvation, and filial piety.⁶⁰² Hardacre excluded occasional memorials as in Europe and the United States from being regarded as ancestor worship.⁶⁰³

On the one hand, the universality of the phenomenon of ancestor practices and veneration challenges Hardacre's view of exempting Europe and America from ancestor worship. For instance, Stavrakopoulou recognised ancestral practices among both 'traditional' and 'secularized' societies. She stated that 'traditional societies' credited ancestors with 'a range of functions and requirements configured within the social, economic, religious, political, cultural and ideological concerns of the living community.'⁶⁰⁴ But she equally observed that contemporary western or secular societies do not also 'exhibit "shallow" death cultures as the peoples' 'death rituals and attitudes to the corpse continue to perform a richly profound and transformative functions within (their) "secularized" societies.'⁶⁰⁵ Julie-Marie Strange also observed that in Britain, reference to the cadaver 'as a thing and talked of in terms of "it" rather than a personal name was a development of late twentieth century. Before then, the close relatives carry out certain acts such as washing, laying out the corpse, carrying the corpse to mortuary, the request for a post-mortem examination as 'a final gesture of intimacy and affection,' and a way to consolidate their memories of the deceased.'⁶⁰⁶ They also prevent external bodies interfering unnecessarily with the remains of their dead because of their belief in the spiritual status of the corpse, the need to protect the dead from evil or danger. They treated their dead with respect and accorded them dignity. These obligations also

⁶⁰² Chen, 'A Christian Response to Chinese Ancestor Practices in Taiwan, 33, 383.

⁶⁰³ Hardacre, 'Ancestor Worship,' 264.

⁶⁰⁴ Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 3–4.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁰⁶ Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1817–1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 66. Strange is a Senior Lecturer in Victorian Studies in the University of Manchester. She wrote her PhD thesis on death in Victorian Britain, available from <http://e-tout.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/profile-julie-marie-strange-senior.html>, Internet, accessed 11 July 2012.

afforded them avenue to express their loss and condolence.⁶⁰⁷ On the other hand, Hardacre could be right because all ancestor practices may not be ancestor worship as indicated by Chen above. In contributing to the discussion of ancestor veneration or worship, Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno preferred the term ‘veneration’ which they held that it however ‘includes the idea of (both) respect and worship.’⁶⁰⁸

Ancestor practices in Urhobo Land are fully examined in Part III, Chapters 7–9 and it is clear that the practices involve worship. The Urhobo worship their ancestors as they do with *edjo*, but with lesser degree of reverence compared to that which is accorded to *Oghene*. Added to the concept of worship is their expected ancestral blessing and protection. The irony however is that the unsatisfied descendants could scorn and sanction their ancestors.⁶⁰⁹ It then means that the ancestors do not have absolute power. Secondly, Urhobo ancestor practices include the genuine intention of continuous care for parents even after death, to nurture their souls providing food and drinks and making them comfortable in *erivwin*. Having had this general overview of Urhobo rites of circumcision and burial, the discussion in the next chapter is turned to the examination of the historical and theological positions of the Baptist Christianity (NBC and DSBC) in Urhobo Land.

⁶⁰⁷ Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain*, 66–67.

⁶⁰⁸ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 121.

⁶⁰⁹ John Tokpabere Agberia, ‘Cosmology and Symbolization in Urhoboland,’ in *Selected Themes in the Study of Religions in Nigeria*, eds. S. G. A. Onibere and M. P. Adogbo, 121–138: 129–30; John Oroshejede Ubrurhe, *Urhobo Traditional Medicine* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2003), 28–29.

CHAPTER SIX–BAPTIST CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE URHOBO

This chapter presents the historical sketch of Baptist Christianity in Urhobo Land and examines the DSBC/NBC burial policy and theologies of death, funeral and afterlife.

6.1 The Beginning of Nigerian Baptist Convention in Urhobo Land

In 1901, Bishop James Johnson came to Sapele and met the Sierra Leoneans, Ghanaians, Yorùbá, the Urhobo and Itsekiri who were government workers and traders, but were from different Christian denominational backgrounds like Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian. They have constituted a single worshipping community. Bishop James Johnson organised them as a local congregation under the Niger Delta Pastorate (NDP) of the Anglican Church. This new congregation lacked qualified personnels among the Urhobo and Itsekiri people who were the citizens of Sapele, Bishop Johnson then employed Yorùbá and Sierra Leonean members who were regarded as better qualified to teach catechism and lead worship among Sapele citizens but in Yorùbá language.

The Urhobo and Itsekiri people preferred to have worshipped in their own languages or in English. They resented the imposition of Yorùbá language as a kind of second level colonization. The problem later precipitated and a group led by Aghoghin Omatsola who was already a catechist with the Anglican Church broke away to join the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) on 16 July 1917.⁶¹⁰ John R. Williams, an American Southern Baptist missionary then represented the NBC.⁶¹¹ Omatsola's base was in Sapele but he

⁶¹⁰ Erivwo, 'Beginnings of Christianity in Urhobo Land and Western Niger Delta, 140–141; Amromare and Onofekohwo, *Pathfinders of Baptist Mission Work in Delta State*, 18, 21; Howell, 'Nigerian Baptist Leaders and their Contributions,' 114ff.

⁶¹¹ Amromare and Onofekohwo, *Pathfinders of Baptist Mission Work in Delta State*, 22 – 24; Erivwo, 'Establishment of Roman Catholic Mission and Other (non-CMS) Christian Missions in Urhobo

was prominent in the group that spread Baptist Churches through Itsekiri and Urhobo Lands. Many Anglican churches he earlier founded in different towns and villages either followed him or got divided into two; Anglican and Baptist.⁶¹² Jove Ejovi Aganbi, another Anglican catechist joined the Baptists in 1926 and worked mainly in Eku town.⁶¹³

In addition to Omatsola and Aganbi, other Urhobo Baptist pioneers included T. O. Odeyeh,⁶¹⁴ J. M. Babaido⁶¹⁵ and E. O. Lawson⁶¹⁶ who were Baptists in Lagos but introduced the Baptist faith to their home towns of Ovade in Oghara-Urhobo in 1914, Okwagbe in Ughievwen-Urhobo in 1917 and Oviri in Okpe-Urhobo in 1920 respectively. Agnes David Emesiri (1924–1994) was an itinerant lady evangelist who founded twenty six Baptist churches and symbolised unusual female contribution to the development of Baptist Christianity in Urhobo Land.⁶¹⁷

Erivwo emphasised the imposition of Yorùbá language on the Urhobo and Itsekiri for worship and catechism by Bishop Johnson, the intolerance of polygamy⁶¹⁸ and homage

and Isoko,' 190; John Anirejuoritse Omatsola, *The Life and Times of Rev. Aghoghin Omatsola (a.k.a. 'ADOLD') 1867–1969 (102 Years): The Pioneer Pastor of Baptist work in Delta and Benin Provinces (Now Delta and Edo States)*, (Lagos: Functional Publishing Company, 2003), 27; Mercy Aninoritselaju Orikri, 'Omatsola Agoghin 1867 – 1969: Nigerian Baptist Convention, Nigeria.' *Dictionary of African Christians Biography*, Overseas Ministeries Study Centre website, available from http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/omatsola_aghogin.html, Internet, accessed 1 March 2012; Adedoyin, *A Short history of the Nigerian Baptist: Baptist Heritage Series 3*, 18–19.

⁶¹² Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 110; Erivwo, 'Establishment of Roman Catholic Mission and Other (non-CMS) Christian Missions in Urhobo and Isoko,' 191.

⁶¹³ Erivwo 'Beginnings of Christianity in Urhobo Land and Western Niger Delta,' 158.

⁶¹⁴ Amromare and Onofekohwo, *Pathfinders of Baptist Mission Work in Delta State*, 61.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶¹⁸ Erivwo 'Beginnings of Christianity in Urhobo Land and Western Niger Delta,' 150. Howell reported that 'Omatsola admitted [...] living in polygamy and [...] was dismissed by the Nigerian Baptist Convention' in 1941(See Howell, 'Nigerian Baptist Leaders and their Contributions,' 117). Other Urhobo Baptist pastors were secret polygamists as at that early stage. However the Nigerian

to the ancestors⁶¹⁹ by the Anglican Church, and power tussle and ‘acrimony over alleged misappropriation of church funds’⁶²⁰ as the major factors responsible for the initial break by Omatsola. Amromare and Onofekohwo agreed with Erivwo except on polygamy factor. They argued that the problem of polygamy in Nigerian church between 1916 and 1920 was not peculiar to Baptist as every denomination struggles with it and polygamists were present in all. Nevertheless, they noted that Omatsola accepted polygamist into full membership of the church and this problem led to his break with American Baptist missionaries in 1941. In addition, they attributed the success of Omatsola-led mass deflection from Anglican Church to his evangelistic zeal which was more than that of his co-Anglican leaders such as I. T. Palmer and Ologundudu.⁶²¹ Stephen E. Aganbi (1921–), a Deacon Emeritus of Ebenezer Baptist Sapele, and one of the pioneers of Baptist work in Urhobo and Itsekiri Lands emphasised that only the financial issue of misappropriation of fund by Omatsola’s colleagues who are mentioned above led to his break away.⁶²² This research considers Erivwo’s points because he is one of the earliest Urhobo Anglican Church historians, whose work developed out of his doctoral research. The subsequent writers confirmed his points partly and the reasons he gave are all embracing. There are therefore cultural issues relating to language, system of marriage and homage to ancestors in the factors that caused the division.

Baptist Convention does not officially accept polygamists as members and do not allow them to partake in the Lord’s Supper or occupy any office in the church. It was included in the Baptist Constitution since 1915 when it was known as Yorùbá Baptist Association (Ibid., 160). Nevertheless, it was often in theory and not in full practice and depending on each pastor in charge. It has also been an issue of long debate among Nigerian Baptists. Only recently it was officially accepted that polygamists can be baptised, admitted to the Lord’s Supper and be accepted as fully fledged members. They are still however excluded from holding certain offices in the church.

⁶¹⁹ Erivwo, ‘Establishment of Roman Catholic Mission and Other (non-CMS) Christian Missions in Urhobo and Isoko,’ 192.

⁶²⁰ Erivwo, ‘Establishment of Roman Catholic Mission and Other (non-CMS) Christian Missions in Urhobo and Isoko,’ *History of The Urhobo People of Niger Delta*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 177–209: 190; Amromare and Onofekohwo, *Pathfinders of Baptist Mission Work in Delta State*, 19–20.

⁶²¹ Amromare and Onofekohwo, *Pathfinders of Baptist Mission Work in Delta State*, 20–21, 59.

⁶²² Stephen E. Aganbi, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Sapele, Interview, 15 May 2012.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that contrary to the common trend in Nigeria whereby the Christian mission works started through Euro-American missionaries, the Baptist work in Urhobo land originated with the citizens who later sought the assistance of the missionaries.⁶²³ S. Ademola Ajayi observed similar phenomenon with the expansion of Baptist work in Nigeria. He stated that it ‘owed much to indigenous efforts of “native” Baptists, especially Ogbomoso Baptists, before being complemented in later years by the American.’⁶²⁴ The implication is that the need for contextual ministry in Urhobo Land was part of the problem that caused the initial division; contextual ministry was also evident at the inception of the Baptist work, therefore, introduction of non contextual policies is bound to meet with resistance and create further conflict. On the burial issue, the conflict which is mostly personal and internal conflict within individual Urhobo Baptists often becomes interpersonal conflicts.

For instance, the ‘Baptist Elders Meeting’ that started in Sapele in 1948 and changed to ‘Baptist Brotherhood’ in 1955,⁶²⁵ because of their preference for Urhobo culture was perceived as constituting a pressure group by certain Baptist pastors like Pinnock E. Onosode (1870–1975), Shedrack A. Akakporo and Joseph Ojigbo Otojare (1927–).⁶²⁶ The group was also accused of being a secret cult which it denied.⁶²⁷ Nevertheless, pastors like Jove Ejovi Aganbi (1894–1957) and E. Metiele Okerentie (1905–1964) were

⁶²³ Amromare and Onofekohwo, *Pathfinders of Baptist Mission Work in Delta State*, 11–12.

⁶²⁴ Ajayi, ‘The place of Ogbomoso in Baptist Missionary Enterprise in Nigeria,’ 24. There were similar occurrences of internal pioneering of Christian works in other places in Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Congo, Uganda, and Lesotho (See Andrew F. Walls, ‘The Evangelical Revival, the Missionary Movement, and Africa,’ in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 79–101 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 86–89).

⁶²⁵ *History of the Nigerian Baptist Convention: Men’s Missionary Union, Delta State Baptist Conference MMU Perspective* (Sapele: God’s Favour Press & Stationeries, 2006), 32.

⁶²⁶ Amromare and Onofekohwo, *Pathfinders of Baptist Mission Work in Delta State*, 52–54, 57, 101–102.

⁶²⁷ *History of the Nigerian Baptist Convention: Men’s Missionary Union*, 7–8.

able to tolerate the group and even preached in their meetings.⁶²⁸ Erivwo reported the comment which he credited to Samson G. Agbaluwa (1918–), one of the pioneer Urhobo Baptists that, although the homage to ancestors was not approved by the Baptist church, the Urhobo people were used to it.⁶²⁹

6.2 The DSBC/NBC Burial Policy

The debate on the Urhobo traditional burial appeared in the minutes of the DSBC 1996 Annual Session, recorded in the 1997 Book of Reports.⁶³⁰ Pastor A. Ifukor, the secretary of the ‘Wake Keeping and Burial Committee’ reported their findings and recommendations. He listed the disadvantages of wake keeping as,

The dangers inherent in leaving one’s house at the mercy of thieves
The risk of travelling by night and its attendant danger of loss of lives and properties
The colossal waste of funds, time and energy
Exposure to evil machinations by devil towards immoral practices to mention but a few⁶³¹

The committee recommended ‘the abrogation of night burial ceremony’ and the approval of day burial on Saturdays.⁶³² Nine years later in 2005, the Convention adopted a similar policy.⁶³³ The introduction of this policy however could not eradicate some of the traditional practices. A majority of the Urhobo Baptists refrained from the Urhobo traditional funeral practices ‘officially,’ while still indulging in them ‘unofficially.’⁶³⁴ Members who are bereaved of a non Christian relative viewed it as an obligation to

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁶²⁹ Erivwo, ‘Establishment of Roman Catholic Mission and Other (non-CMS) Christian Missions in Urhobo and Isoko,’ 192.

⁶³⁰ Delta State Baptist Conference, *Book of Reports and Minutes of the Third Annual Session*, 34–35.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 34.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ *Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention*, 1–5. See Appendix 4.

⁶³⁴ The writer uses the terms ‘officially’ and ‘unofficially’ intentionally to show how the Urhobo Baptists have maintained double position on funeral issue.

perform the family duty in the traditional form in the night. Members, who commiserated with them, in one breath, did not attend officially in the name of the church, but in another, almost all the church members attended purely in a personal capacity to identify with the bereaved as church, family or community members. Church members performed the traditional rites at the family compound at the same time with the church burial or later. They kept such away from the pastor and the church, but profoundly derived cultural meaning and relevance from active participation. There were cases where some Baptist church members performed the cultural rites by proxy out of fear.⁶³⁵

Certain portions of the policy that are directly applicable to Urhobo traditional burial system are enumerated below.

There may be no wake keeping for any Baptist member since there is no spiritual benefit derived from it. Where it is observed it should be done only as service of songs.⁶³⁶

All burial ceremonies should end on the day of burial. The third, eighth, fortieth or any other second burial should be abolished.⁶³⁷

Churches should not get involved in internments where fetish practices and elements are introduced.⁶³⁸

The above passages raise the issues of night wake, burial in stages, and ‘fetish practices.’ The policy substitutes the night wake with ‘service of songs,’ out rightly rejects burial in stages and exempts the Baptist church from ‘fetish’ involvement. Thus the policy positively addresses the issue of night wake but did not adequately attend to the other two. It is traditional and customary for the Urhobo to carry out their funeral rites in stages. As indicated in chapter five, Urhobo rites are in processes involving a

⁶³⁵ Respondent 4.

⁶³⁶ *Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention*, 3.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

longer period of time in days and months which adequately meet their emotional needs rather than a quick programme which the policy recommended. There is also the problem of ambivalence with policy's statement on the involvement with the 'fetish practices and elements.' Since the policy did not clearly define what it means by 'fetish,' the policy enforcement agency in DSBC often equate all traditional Urhobo practices in funeral to 'fetish practices and elements.' The policy fails to achieve its stated aim to recognise the 'context of' the 'diverse cultural backgrounds'⁶³⁹ within the NBC but views the whole traditional rite as 'unchristian'⁶⁴⁰ and eschews it.

The above weaknesses notwithstanding, the policy rightly identifies certain traditional practices that needed critical appraisal. One major example is stated under the 'treatment of widows,'

It is observed that some tribes torture women when their husbands die. Such ill treatments may include: the widows are required to sleep on mat, plank or bare floor; be half clothed, forced to eat in broken plates, sleep in the same room with the corpse, drink the corpse-bath-water, shave her head and wear mourning cloth which differentiates them, not to walk in the house, or put in solitary confinement, for certain periods they are not allowed to show sign of smile, seizing the deceased spouse's property and all other practices that are unchristian. Unfortunately, some sisters-in-law, who are mourning, or widowhood enforcement agents, oppress some of these widows too.⁶⁴¹

Out of the listed practices, those of sleeping with the corpse, shaving the head, wearing mourning clothes occur among the Urhobo and will be discussed in chapter nine, sections 9.2 and 9.3. However, it is important to note that the Urhobo culture does not view them as torture. Rather, they are ways of grieving the death of a person that is dearly loved. Nonetheless, when one considers that the practices that are expected of women to mourn their husbands are not equally expected of men concerning their wives,

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

it then indicates a way of the culture treating the women lesser than men. In that wise, the policy could be right to identify it as torture, oppressive and discriminatory. For instance, as mentioned in chapter nine, section 9.3, a widow lies in the opposite direction by the side of the corpse of the husband but the tradition does not require the husband to do same.

The DSBC leaders gave reasons⁶⁴² that made the Urhobo traditional burial unacceptable to the Baptist denomination. First, the Baptist leaders view the rite of *evwe ehun* and slaughtering of other goats as ‘pagan’ sacrifices. They added that other practices like shooting of guns to drive away the spirit of the dead and other evil spirits and arming the dead with weapons to fight his/her killers are equally unchristian⁶⁴³ and ‘fetish.’⁶⁴⁴ A Baptist respondent however views the shooting of guns as signifying important occasions and that the practice is accommodated in Christian burials nowadays.⁶⁴⁵

Second, they perceive that the social aspect of the night burial is full of unchristian practices like excessive alcoholic drinking and illicit sexual acts. Third, they also consider the social risks such as the possibility for the attack of armed robbers during or after night wakes. Fourth, they recognise the time pressure and the demand that the stretch of the Friday wake keeping, Saturday burial and Sunday church service place on the Christians and the church pastors.⁶⁴⁶ Fifth the treatments given to widows are seen as torture.⁶⁴⁷ Sixth, the nature of Urhobo burial is expensive for the bereaved⁶⁴⁸ and the

⁶⁴² Delta State Baptist Conference, *Book of Reports and Minutes of the Third Annual Session*, 34.

⁶⁴³ Respondents 12 and 14.

⁶⁴⁴ *Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention*, 5.

⁶⁴⁵ Respondent 23.

⁶⁴⁶ Respondent 3.

⁶⁴⁷ *Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention*, 2

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3

demands of *emetẹ uvwevwin* can be burdensome.⁶⁴⁹ It is important to examine the historic-theological background of NBC/DSBC in order to adequately understand the bases for its position on Urhobo burial.

6.3 The NBC/DSBC Theologies of Death, Funeral and After life

In searching for the NBC historic-theology, the materials consulted included the NBC *Statements of Faith and Practice* (NBCSFP) which is directly based on the Baptist Faith and Message (BFM) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Others are Schleithem Confession, adopted by a Swiss Anabaptist Brethren Conference, February 24, 1527⁶⁵⁰ and the First London Confession, 1644 revised in 1646 which represent the NBC link to the root of all Baptists in Europe.

The NBC position on the fate of the dead could be seen in the NBCSFP section 13, ‘Last Things.’ It states,

The world will be brought to a final end by God at His own time and in His own way. The time this will happen is known only to God Himself. At that time, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in his glory, the dead will be raised and Christ will judge all people in righteousness. Those who have rejected Christ will be sent to hell while those who have by faith received his righteousness will reign forever with Christ in their resurrected and glorified bodies.⁶⁵¹

The article is recorded in BFM section 10 and reads,

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and

⁶⁴⁹ See chapter nine, section 9.1.2.

⁶⁵⁰ Schleithem Confession, adopted by a Swiss Anabaptist Brethren Conference, February 24, 1527 available from <http://www.anabaptists.org/history/the-schleithem-confession.html>, Internet, accessed 17 February 2012.

⁶⁵¹ *Statements of Faith and Practice of The Nigerian Baptist Convention* (Igede-Ekiti: Nigerian Baptist Convention-in-Session, April 29, 1993), 21. The Convention member churches reproduce the tenets in their Constitutions under the heading, ‘Articles of Faith.’ For example it appeared in *The Constitution of Ebenezer Baptist Church (Nigerian Baptist Convention)*, 40 Okpe/Awolowo Road, P. O. Box 34, Sapele- Delta State, adopted on 20th December 1998 (n. p.: n. p., 1998), 5–6.

Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.⁶⁵²

With this statement of belief, NBC holds that the fate of a person is unalterable after death and therefore sets an impassable barrier between the unrighteous and righteous. Consequently, the idea of praying for the dead is untenable within the NBC tradition. Many biblical passages are cited in support of this doctrinal statement⁶⁵³ out of which Hebrews 9: 27–28 is particularly emphasised. It reads, ‘And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.’ Among the implications drawn by NBC preachers from this text is that there is no opportunity for amendment or repentance in the grave.⁶⁵⁴ Consequently, there is nothing that anyone can do to improve either the physical or spiritual condition of the deceased. The NBCSFP and BFM sections cited above describe Christ’s judgement at the end of time, and following general resurrection of the

⁶⁵² Adrian Rogers and others, ‘Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message’ (n.p.: Southern Baptist Convention, 1999–2011), available from <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp>; Internet, accessed 19 March 2011). The BFM is based on the New Hampshire Confession of Faith of 1894. It was first drafted in 1925 in Kentucky, led by Edgar Young Mullins (1860–1928), revised in 1963 (Kansas City), chaired by Herschel Harold Hobbs (1907–1995), amended in 1988 and again revised in 2000 (Orlando), chairman by Adrian Pierce Rogers (1931–2005). Three sections XV, ‘The Righteous and The Wicked,’ XVI, ‘The Resurrection’ and XVII, ‘The Return of the Lord’ in the 1925 edition, which are related to the subject of this research are compressed into one section X, ‘The Last Things’ in the 1963 and 2000 editions. The chairmen, Mullins, Hobbs and Rogers were among the past presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention. (See William H. Brackney, *The A to Z of the Baptists* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 284, 398–399, 490). The same article appeared in section XI, ‘Last Things’ in Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), 100.

⁶⁵³ Ibid. The scriptural texts cited for this doctrinal support wherever it is recorded are Isaiah 2: 4; 11: 9; Matthew 16: 27; 18: 8–9; 19: 28; 24: 27, 30, 36, 44; 25: 31–46; 26: 64; Mark 8: 38; 9: 43–48; Luke 12: 40, 48; 16: 19–26; 17: 22–37; 21: 27–28; John 14: 1–3; Acts 1: 11; 17: 31; Romans 14: 10; 1 Corinthians 4: 5; 15: 24–28, 35–58; 2 Corinthians 5: 10; Philippians 3: 20–21; Colossians 1: 5; 3: 4; 1 Thessalonians 4: 14–18; 5: 1ff.; 2 Thessalonians 1: 7ff.; 2; 1 Timothy 6: 14; 2 Timothy 4: 1, 8; Titus 2: 13; Hebrews 9: 27–28; James 5: 8; 2 Peter 3: 7ff.; 1 John 2: 28; 3: 2; Jude 14; Revelation 1: 18; 3: 11; 20: 1–22: 13.

⁶⁵⁴ I think this teaching may also be supported with Ecclesiastes 9:10, ‘Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going’ (NRSV).

dead. The NBCSFP partly reads, ‘Those who have rejected Christ will be sent to hell while those who have by faith received his righteousness will reign forever with Christ in their resurrected and glorified bodies.’⁶⁵⁵ Thus Baptists believe that physical death brings end to any kind of amendment⁶⁵⁶ hence they persuade people to repent when alive before it would be too late, that is before death strikes.

Edgar Young Mullins (1860–1928), an American Southern Baptist theologian expressed the lack of much information on the resurrection of the wicked.⁶⁵⁷ He however noted Paul’s presentation of ‘a very glorious account of the resurrection of the dead in Christ’ in First Corinthians chapter fifteen.⁶⁵⁸ Then, Mullins underscored that the dead waiting for the final judgement does not imply that God is uncertain of their final destiny until that judgement, but that the judgement will be based on the condition in which they had lived whether in unbelief or as Christians.⁶⁵⁹ Herschel Harold Hobbs (1907–1995), another SBC theologian made a brief reference to Jesus descent to Hades, the abode of the dead, as well as that of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke chapter sixteen. Hobbs concluded that, the souls of both the righteous and unrighteous will enter Hades at death and remain conscious but the lost will be in punishment while the saved enjoy fellowship with Christ. He emphasised that, ‘at judgement this state of each is fixed eternally’ and that the New Testament does not teach that Hades can be ‘used in the sense of purgatory.’⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁵ *Statements of Faith and Practice of The Nigerian Baptist Convention*, 21.

⁶⁵⁶ Sheppy, stated that ‘Protestants will fight shy of the suggestion that a funeral enacts anything for the dead, citing Heb. 9:27 [...] They will mean by their quotation that death ends the possibility of repentance, and hence any amendment in the deceased’s eternal destiny’ (See Paul J. Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual, Vol. 1: A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 78).

⁶⁵⁷ Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs*, 59.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 59–61.

⁶⁶⁰ Hobbs, *What Baptists Believe*, 109; Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, 105.

John Gill (1697–1771), an English Baptist pastor, biblical scholar, theologian and Bible Commentary writer also explained Hebrew 9: 27 that,

There is a particular judgment which is immediately after death; by virtue of which, the souls of men are condemned to their proper state of happiness or woe; and there is an universal judgment, which will be after the resurrection of the dead, and is called eternal judgment.⁶⁶¹

Gill's statement also does not give room for any improvement between the two judgements. Consequently, the Baptists believe that there is no remedy after death and there is a non-crossable gap between the living and the dead. As in Jesus parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke chapter sixteen, no dead person was allowed to come out to preach to the living.⁶⁶² In the same vein, the Nigerian Baptists believe that the prayers of the living could not avail for the dead. Thus, the NBC believes in eternal separation between the saved and the lost resulting to eternal blessedness of the saved, and punishment of the lost⁶⁶³ with no opportunity for 'second probation.'⁶⁶⁴ However, the account of Jesus descent to the dead, and the resurrection of many saints in Jerusalem upon his death⁶⁶⁵ are yet to be properly understood.

The Baptists positions of eternal separation between the righteous and the unrighteous at death and of eternal damnation of the unsaved are regarded to be based on their belief of the Bible. They believe in the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. In other words, the Holy Bible (Old and New Testaments only, excluding the Apocrypha) is the true record of God's work in the universe. Also, that the life and will of Jesus Christ as

⁶⁶¹ John Gill, 'Heb. 9: 27' *Exposition of the whole Bible*, available from <http://www.freegrace.net/gill/>, Internet, accessed on 26th January 2012. This authority is cited as one of the Baptist pioneer theologians and 'the first to write a verse-by-verse commentary on the entire Bible' (See Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 94).

⁶⁶² Luke 16: 19–31.

⁶⁶³ *The Constitution of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Sapele*, 6.

⁶⁶⁴ Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs*, 81.

⁶⁶⁵ Matthew 27: 52–53.

revealed in Holy Scriptures is ‘the only authority for faith and practice.’⁶⁶⁶ Consequently, the Baptists believe that the general revelation through the light of nature and human culture, no matter how good, could not compare with special revelation in the Bible and is not sufficient for salvation.⁶⁶⁷ Noting their preference for ‘literary or synchronic’ method of interpreting the bible, members of NBC believe in the devotional reading and are therefore likely to take certain biblical passages⁶⁶⁸ as literal as possible.

The Baptist position is also based on their history. Schleithem Confession 1527 and The First London Confession 1644 and 1646 are historical and foundational statements of Baptist faith. There are seven articles in the Schleithem Confession 1527. They are ‘believer’s baptism, excommunication, the Lord’s Supper, separation from the world [or abomination], the office of the pastor, non use of the sword, and non taking of oaths.’⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁶ *Statements of Faith and Practice of The Nigerian Baptist Convention*, 1–2; *The Constitution of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Sapele*, 5; Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 716; Hobbs, *What Baptists Believe*, 64. Henry Wansbrough, a Roman Catholic priest and professor of Biblical Studies at Liverpool Hope University stated that the Vatican II with its constitution on *Dei Verbum*, had adjusted the Roman Catholic view on Scripture and Church tradition as two sources of revelation to conclude that there is only one source which is ‘the Scripture as seen through the eyes of the Church and taught by the Church’ (See Henry Wansbrough, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Brief History of Biblical Interpretation* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), x–xi. Wansbrough’s view therefore amounts to a challenge that the view of Scripture as the sole source of revelation and sole authority for Christian practice is no longer unique to the Protestants. With a careful study of *Dei Verbum* however, it is difficult to accept Wansbrough’s claim in this regard. *Dei Verbum* clearly established that sacred church tradition produced the Sacred Scripture, that ‘both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence,’ and that the Roman Catholic ‘Church has always venerated divine Scriptures [...] together with sacred tradition as the supreme rule of faith (See *Dei Verbum* (‘Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation’), Solemnly promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965, Art., 8, 9 and 21, available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, Internet, accessed 16 March 2012).

⁶⁶⁷ Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs*, 10.

⁶⁶⁸ Example of such passages include Leviticus 19: 28, ‘You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD;’ Psalm 106: 28, ‘Then they attached themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead; Luke 9: 60, ‘But Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’’ There are other passages like Leviticus 21: 1–6, 11; Numbers 19: 11; Deuteronomy 14: 1; 18: 11; and the like which with literary or synchronic reading suggest that the dead is unclean and could only cause defilement to the people of God. The synchronic Baptist readers may however not attempt a difficult passage like I Corinthians 15: 29 which reads, ‘Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?’ Paul J. Sheppy also made references to 1Peter 3: 18–4: 6 but without expatiating on the passage (See Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual Volume I*, 78.)

⁶⁶⁹ Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 10.

The fourth which is ‘Separation from Abomination’ at that time, emphasised separation from ‘all Catholic and Protestant works, and church services, and meetings,’ and the like, but the inclusion of different traditional cultural practices was also not unlikely. Drawing a dividing line between ‘God’s temple and idols,’ Baptists are expected to separate themselves from the latter and its ‘abominable practices.’ The First London Confession 1644 and 1646 had fifty three articles but James Leo Garret summarised them into five general topics relating to doctrinal differences between the Calvinists and the Arminians, the Bible as the rule of Faith, the person and work of Christ, the sequence of ‘God’s acts in saving believers,’ and beliefs about the church.⁶⁷⁰ Among other things on this last topic, the confession defined the church as ‘a company of visible Saints, called and separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel.’⁶⁷¹

The Baptists stand is also based on their doctrine. They believe in soul competency, religious freedom, priesthood of believers, believers’ baptism by immersion and separation of church and state.⁶⁷² They also emphasise the lordship or sovereignty of Christ, the supreme and sole authority of the Bible for faith and practice.⁶⁷³ In other words, the individual Baptist’s freedom and competency in thoughts and actions are subjected to the control of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. The Baptists thought that their doctrinal position makes them distinct from other Christians but Garrett observed that such view is contestable.⁶⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the Baptist members

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 53–59.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁷² Edward Young Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Macon Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2010), 59; Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), 4, 7–12; Frank D. Rees, ‘Baptist Identity: Immersion through Worship,’ *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 5, no. 1 (September 2004), 5–17: 6.

⁶⁷³ *Statements of Faith and Practice of The Nigerian Baptist Convention*, 1, See also, Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 531–532.

⁶⁷⁴ Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 533; Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, iv.

thought they are free, non-liturgical, non-hierarchical and non-creedal,⁶⁷⁵ meaning they are not established by any civil government, they operate flexible order of service, they practicing congregational polity, and they do not confess to any formal creed apart from the Scriptures. Sheppy has also challenged the Baptist thought of being non-liturgical. He observed that the Baptist patterns of funeral service with features like *Nunc Dimitis* and *Proficiscere* are not completely independent of the other creedal churches.⁶⁷⁶ The strength of his argument is that no Christian church can avoid liturgy and there cannot be an organized church service without a liturgy. It is important to note that the concept of separation or distinctiveness runs through Baptist doctrines, administration and liturgy and it is similar with its theology.

This concept of separation from the world and from formal religion further and naturally pitched the Baptists against traditional cultures and NBC against Nigerian traditional activities like Urhobo funeral rites. It also has influence on their approach to conversion. To the Baptists, conversion involves ‘the inward change of mind or attitude, with its ‘outward direct result’⁶⁷⁷ of ‘turning from the old life of rebellion against God to one of service to God.’⁶⁷⁸ Hobbs made reference to ‘cleansing’ in Ephesians 5: 26 and explained that, in the process of conversion, ‘the soul is cleansed of sin and made new or fresh by the Holy Spirit.’⁶⁷⁹ He stated further that, ‘in regeneration the penitent believer receives a new nature (which) involves a moral and spiritual renewal of the will, aim,

⁶⁷⁵ Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 533. Although the Baptists claim to be non-creedal (Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, iv). E. Y. Mullins, Southern Baptist Convention Theologian, understood creeds as ‘the natural and normal expression of the religious life’ and recognised that ‘there are a number of excellent Baptist creeds already.’ He however maintained that ‘no Baptist creed can be set up as final and authoritative apart from the Scriptures’ (See E. Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1925), 5–7). Considering the limitations of creed, he wrote, ‘we would do well to reject all creeds and go straight to the New Testament rather than lapse into a barren intellectualism through a dead creed (Ibid., 9).

⁶⁷⁶ Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual Volume II*, 124–126.

⁶⁷⁷ Herschel H. Hobbs, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1964), 97.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 98. Scripture references include Matthew 3: 8; 7: 16, 20; Acts 9: 1–22.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

and purpose of life.⁶⁸⁰ This new nature imparted by God (2 Corinthians 5: 17) connotes the idea of ‘new birth’ and denotes ‘the spiritual change wrought by the Holy Spirit whereby a child of Satan becomes a child of God.’⁶⁸¹

While Hobbs emphasised the concept of ‘renewal/cleansing’ of heart through baptism, the obvious practice with certain leaders of DSBC/NBC is that of separate religion—putting off the old/putting on the new. On the subject of Christian conversion, Andrew Walls⁶⁸² is of the opinion that with God’s breath of life into Adam, ‘the new creation takes place with pre-existing materials.’⁶⁸³ He explained therefore that conversion should be understood as ‘turning what is already there (as in primal religion) towards Christ, (implying that) it is less about content than about direction.’⁶⁸⁴ Walls identified ‘the twin forces’ of conversion theories that are often in tension—‘indigenizing’ and ‘pilgrim’ principles.⁶⁸⁵ The first is to make a Christian a citizen and to be at home in a place; the second is to make him a stranger ‘not fully at home in this world.’⁶⁸⁶ Walls underscored that these two concepts ‘are not in opposition, nor are they to be held in some kind of balance.’ He explained further that ‘We need not fear getting too much of one or the other, only too little,’ and that ‘both are the direct result of (the) incarnational and translational process of God’s redemptive work through Christ.’⁶⁸⁷ Walls’s reason for stating that the two views should not be held in balance is unclear and the danger has been that people can hold on more to one of the theories at the expense of the other. Therefore a kind of balance is imperative.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 98–99.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 99.

⁶⁸² Walls is not a Baptist but a Methodist minister. He however had experience of serving in Sierra Leone and Nigeria for many years.

⁶⁸³ Walls, ‘Worldview and Christian Conversion,’ 157.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 157, 158.

⁶⁸⁵ Walls, ‘Culture and Conversion in Christian History,’ in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 43–54: 53–54.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

Scholars have examined the Pauline concept of ‘new creature in Christ’ in 2 Corinthians 5: 17 and Galatians 6: 15 and there are four current strands of interpretations. They are (1) ‘the soterio-anthropological’ or ‘new creature’ theory which emphasises ‘the inner transformation of individual believer, (2) the apocalyptic-cosmological, or ‘new creation’ theory, (3) the ecclesiological or ‘new community’ theory and (4) the ‘eschatologically infused soteriology’ theory which combines ‘both cosmological and anthropological elements.’⁶⁸⁸ Each of these theories have only emphasised different areas of people’s life that conversion affects whereas, it is important to understand that true conversion will affect all the aspects enumerated. Nevertheless, conversion may not necessarily mean removal and replacement but renewal and reformation of people’s past, including their cultural heritage.⁶⁸⁹ For instance, Cyril C. Okorochoa shows how an Igbo Anglican minister who became a chief in his community retained traditional ideas relating to the throne but changed the traditional symbols of *ofò* and python to the Christian one—the cross.⁶⁹⁰ It was an act of turning traditional religion unto Christianity. Interpreting Okorochoa’s work later, Andrew Walls observed that Christianity among the Igbo people ‘did not require a complete redrawing of the map of (their) spiritual world.’⁶⁹¹ Walls expatiated further that since the Igbos had always recognized the *Chukwu* (‘Supreme Being’), ‘what (Christian preaching) enjoined was a redirection of

⁶⁸⁸ Eastman Susan, Review of *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought* by Moyer V. Hubbard, *Review of Biblical Literature*, 5 (2003), 459–462: 459; K. E. Brower, Review of *New Creation in Paul’s Thought and Letters* by Moyer V. Hubbard, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 76, no. 3 (July, 2004), 262–264: 262; Moyer Hubbard, Review of *New Creation in Paul’s Letters: A Study of the Historical & Social Setting of a Pauline Concept* by T. Ryan Jackson, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 83, no. 3 (2011), 286–288: 286.

⁶⁸⁹ Attempts to campaign for separation fo Christian faith from people’s culture based on the advocacy of Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35–108) to separate Christianity from Judaism is inadequate. Certainly while non-Jewish Christians may separate from Jewish culture, the Jewish Christians themselves could not completely break away. Ignatius stated that, ‘It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity wherein every tongue believed and was gathered together unto God’ (See J. B. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers* ed. J. R. Harner (Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 71; Letter of *Ignatius to the Magnesians* 8:1, 9:1-2, 10:3).

⁶⁹⁰ Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa*, 266.

⁶⁹¹ Walls, ‘The Evangelical Revival, the Missionary Movement, and Africa, 89.

religion away from the now-discredited lesser divinities,⁶⁹² a break with ‘part (not all) of the past.’⁶⁹³ In a similar thought pattern, the Urhobo funeral concepts could be redirected for Baptist use but ‘in a dynamic equilibrium despite inevitable tensions.’⁶⁹⁴

From the Baptist Union of Great Britain perspective, Paul J. Sheppy analysed the Baptist principal beliefs and practices about death and bereavement as follows. There is assumption that the deceased has professed faith in Christ. The pastoral concern for the bereaved is uppermost while reference to the dead is secondary, talking only about the dead but not articulating any plea on his or her behalf.⁶⁹⁵ Consequently, the emphasis is on thanksgiving for the deceased’s life as memorial and on a triumphant proclamation of the resurrection hope that is bases on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁶⁹⁶ Although Sheppy stated that Baptists appear not to have an articulated theology of death and bereavement nor set prayers and orders which may contradict their feature of flexible and free worship,⁶⁹⁷ it is obvious that with his analyses, Sheppy has succeeded in beginning to articulate Baptist theology of death and bereavement. The NBC share similar views with their British counterparts that its deceased member must have being a believer who does not need any prayers to enter rest. Therefore, the concern of the church is thanksgiving for the deceased’s life and comfort for the bereaved based on the hope of glory fostered by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

S. T. Ola Akande, as a contextual theologian took cognisance of Yorùbá Baptists beliefs relating to death and funeral. He made references to ‘mysterious circumstances,’ *sigidi*

⁶⁹² Ibid.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa*, 267.

⁶⁹⁵ Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual Volume II*, 124.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 125–127.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 124.

(‘invisible spirits’), ‘spirit world,’ strange visit by snakes and the like.⁶⁹⁸ He also mentioned his own predecessors in the office of the General Secretary of the Convention, who were dead, and who appeared to him in dreams to assure him of their support.⁶⁹⁹ In a particular occasion and with the text of Hebrew 12: 1, he included his listeners’ late fathers and mothers in ‘a great cloud of witness’ with whom they are surrounded, and whose unseen presence would always be there as angels of God to guard, guide, and bless their children.⁷⁰⁰ Contextual theology for Urhobo Baptist funeral is also possible and valuable. Therefore, the next three chapters are centred on properly understanding Urhobo burial traditions, starting with Urhobo myth of the origin of death.

⁶⁹⁸ Akande, *Sermons of Hope and Solace In Times of Hardship, Loneliness or Bereavement*, 1.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 6–8.

**PART III–FIELDWORK–URUEMU R’ORIVWIN R’ESHIO R’IHWO R’URHOBO
(‘URHOBO BURIAL TRADITIONS’): THE CASE STUDY OF IDJERHE-
URHOBO**

CHAPTER SEVEN–MYTH AND WORLDVIEW

This chapter opens the discussion on Urhobo funeral tradition by examining the Urhobo myth concerning the origin of death and its moral implications. It also explores other related concepts in Idjerhe-Urhobo like the concepts of universe, human personality, funeral rituals and the related spirits. Urhobo universe consists of *akpo* (‘life or earth’) and *erivwin* (‘spiritual abode’) and *erivwin-r’orua* (‘spiritual abode of the extended family’) and the human personality components are *ugboma* (‘body’), and *erhi* (‘soul/spirit’). The Urhobo perform rituals of *agberen* (‘burial’), *ihurhe* (‘ancestral shrine’), *evwe ehun* (‘waist goat’), and *esakpegodi* (‘fourth/fifth generation celebration–great-great grandchild’) to forestall the disturbance of *erhierhi r’osuosuo* (‘wandering spirits’) either for the dead or the living.

7.1 Urhobo Mythology of the Origin of Death

Out of all Urhobo scholars, Nabofa is renowned for articulating the Urhobo myth of the origin of death which he collected as oral literature from Uhwere-Urhobo. He narrated that *Oghene* wanted his creatures to live forever but there arose a misunderstanding between human beings and animals over their fate if they continued to stay on earth.⁷⁰¹ They therefore sent a toad and a dog to *Oghene*. The toad’s message was that the creatures agreed not to live forever, but to die and return to *Oghene* in *odjuvwu* (‘heavenly home’) after a while. The dog’s message was the opposite. The creatures

⁷⁰¹ Nabofa, ‘Reincarnation: The Doctrine of Heredity and Hope in Urhobo Culture,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 288–298: 289.

decided that any message that first reached *Oghene* will be honoured. They had trusted the fast ability of dog and were hopeful of its message first reaching *Oghene* and then, they will live forever, but unfortunately, the dog was distracted by human faeces and fat bones. It overfed, slept and was overtaken by the toad. As a result, the message of the toad first reached *Oghene* and the creatures started dying. It then became clear that the lack of focus and concentration by the dog brought death to all. Nevertheless, the people accused the toad of causing death. This mythology earned the toad its Urhobo name, *oghwuokpo*, or *orogwhuruokpo* ('He who dies should go home')⁷⁰² and children in Urhobo villages use to throw stones at any toad they sighted blaming it for causing death. They however still keep dog as a useful domestic animal perhaps not paying attention to its lackadaisical attitude as the real cause of death. The Uhweru-Urhobo myth of the origin of death is similar to that of Sierra Leoneans but with a slight difference. In the Sierra Leonean version, God sent a dog and a toad with the messages of immortality and death respectively. On the way the dog stopped to eat and the toad reached men first to deliver its message of death.⁷⁰³ Thus while the direction of the message was from the creatures to their Creator in the Uhweru-Urhobo myth, it was vice versa in the Sierra Leonean version, but the ingredients of both myths remain the same.

Myths like the ones above are narrated as cosmic stories of 'events that took place in primordial time, often by acts of supernatural beings,' and sometimes involving human beings and animals. They are means of communication of religious knowledge in traditional societies. There are myths of origins including the origin of death.⁷⁰⁴ Myths are however not solely 'intellectual discourses that answer questions of "why" and

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 110.

⁷⁰⁴ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 257; Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 26, 77–78.

“wherefore,” they can also address issues of mysteries and infinite realities which people cannot fully comprehend.⁷⁰⁵ There are other views of myths as fictitious, prelogical, primitive, fables.⁷⁰⁶ Myths are of different kinds and for different purposes. They can give an understanding of people’s identity or ‘shape who people want to be and how they should live.’⁷⁰⁷ Describing the functional roles of myths in ‘giving meaning to human existence,’ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénoú stated that, myths and rituals communicate knowledge and wisdom—‘an understanding of the picture (of reality) as a whole.’⁷⁰⁸ They further express it thus,

Myths fulfil an indispensable need in the lives of most people. They express, enhance, and codify belief; safeguard and enforce morality; assure the efficacy of rituals; and contain practical rules for the guidance of humans. Myths are vital to human civilization. They are not idle tales, but hardworking; active forces. They are not intellectual explanations or artistic imagery, but charters of life and moral wisdom.⁷⁰⁹

On the aspect of wisdom and values for life, myths ‘model acceptable behaviors in the society, and so teach people codes of ethics.’⁷¹⁰ In this light, the Urhobo myth of origin of death contributes to Urhobo moral philosophy in addition to clarifying that *Oghene* originally intended his creatures to possess immortality. For instance, slothfulness and greediness caused the dog’s failure, whereas, persistence and steadfastness made the toad successful, even though the toad’s success brought death to human beings and animals. People can however learn to avoid the vices and embrace the virtues communicated through the folklore in their own life endeavours. Also, if the error of the dog can bring death to all creatures, then the mistake of one person can affect a whole family, town, nation, generation and indeed, the whole world. In addition, the Urhobo

⁷⁰⁵Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénoú, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 258.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 260–261.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

myth about the origin of death also teaches that delay is dangerous. The motif of this myth is to instil the principles of good life in Urhobo people and to explain the cause of death as originated from the creatures rather than the Creator. The myth further highlights the values of certain moral virtues like persistence, steadfastness, focus, responsibility and promptness as against slothfulness, greediness, distraction, irresponsibility and procrastination.

7.2 Idjerhe-Urhobo Burial Worldview and Major Concepts

Paul G. Hiebert defined worldview as the ‘fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things and which they use to order their lives.’⁷¹¹ Put more succinctly, ‘worldviews are what people in a community take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living.’⁷¹² In another account, Hiebert, with Shaw and Tiénou defined worldviews as ‘the most encompassing frameworks of thought that relate belief systems to one another.’⁷¹³ They explained further that ‘worldview assumptions are taken for granted [...]. They are reinforced by the deepest of feelings, and anyone who challenges them challenges the very foundations of people’s lives.’⁷¹⁴

In the face of Christians’ experiences inbetween worldviews, David J. Hesselgrave and Edward R. Rommen highlighted ‘the importance of communicating Christian worldview in missionizing’ over against what they regarded as ‘syncretistic worldviews.’⁷¹⁵ Walls however gave a revealing insight that ‘except as an abstract concept, there is no such

⁷¹¹ Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of how People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 15.

⁷¹² Ibid.

⁷¹³ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 40.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 212.

thing as the Christian worldview.’⁷¹⁶ Illustrating with a concept of ‘worldview map,’ Walls thought that ‘worldview maps are both personal and collective’⁷¹⁷ with some kinds of ‘oscillation and variation’⁷¹⁸ between the two poles. He explained that, while ‘there are elements from the sources that Christians in general trust, which will give a broad similarity to their operational maps’⁷¹⁹ it is certain that,

Christians from any given place or time will have other sources that they share, not with their fellow-Christians of other cultures, but with the non-Christians of their own. [Therefore there could be] ‘in practice, various Christian worldviews, all sharing Christian elements, but some sharing other operational features with Muslim or Buddhist or primal traditionalist or modern agnostic neighbours.’⁷²⁰

Walls also observed an important factor that ‘worldview maps [...] are usually revised and corrected, [but] not abandoned and replaced.’⁷²¹ Based on his experience of Christian ministry in African context, he concluded that

Traditional African maps of the universe often had four components relating to the transcendent world: God, local divinities or territorial spirits, ancestors, and objects of power.⁷²²

Walls’s observation of intertwined worldview above and the strong influence of culture to condition peoples’ ‘perception, judgement, communication, behaviour, and expectations and location of power in a given society’ as earlier defined and described by Mazrui, Airhihenbuwa and Adogbo already mentioned in chapter one, section 1.2 are real in Urhobo context. For instance, the aspects of the Urhobo worldview which encourage peaceful relationship with transcendental spirits like those of ancestors still remain with the people despite the presence of Baptist Church and other Christian churches in Urhobo land for over a century [since 1900]. Agberia described the Urhobo

⁷¹⁶ Walls, ‘Worldview and Christian Conversion,’ in *Mission in Context*, 156.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ Ibid., 157.

⁷²² Ibid., 162.

worldview as ‘a complex of whole beliefs, habits, the laws, customs and traditions recognised to hold the Urhobo people together over time.’⁷²³ The Urhobo worldview involves their understanding of ‘reality, the universe, life and existence,’ the immortality of soul, including ‘their attitude to life’ or sense of value and life purpose.⁷²⁴ Agberia concluded that the maintenance of a ‘constant good relationship with the transcendental’ spirits including the spirit of the ancestors is of the utmost value among the Urhobo people.⁷²⁵ The Idjerhe-Urhobo worldview of life, death and relationship with the dead does not differ from that other Urhobo sub-cultural groups as explained by Agberia and which is expressed in the works of other Urhobo scholars already examined.

7.2.1 The *akpo* (‘life or earth’) and *erivwin* (‘spiritual abode’)

The Urhobo universe has two major compartments; the physical *akpo*⁷²⁶ and the spiritual *erivwi*. The *akpo* could mean ‘life’ or ‘earth.’ For instance, *akpo mę yovwire* (‘my life is now good’) and *Oghęne ma akpo* (‘God created the earth’). The understanding and usage of *erivwin* is also multidimensional. It could mean ‘a place beyond the earth,’ ‘the abode of the dead or gods’ and sometimes used interchangeably with *urhoro* (‘eternal happiness’), or *odjuvwu* (‘heaven’). Most Urhobo scholars understood *erivwin* in term of good and bad but Ekeh added the dimension of upper and lower chambers with his use of the term, ‘stepped-down *erivwin*’ for the lower chamber which is ‘sandwiched

⁷²³ Agberia, ‘Cosmology and Symbolization in Urhoboland,’ 122.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Micheal Y. Nabofa gives a detail treatment of the Urhobo concept of *akpo* which could mean the physical and geographical world space, or human life as in existence. There could also be a sundry use of *akpo* for a ‘way of life’ or ‘culture.’ Nabofa gave a list of Urhobo names with *akpo* as either a prefix, or middle term or a suffix to explain the Urhobo concept of *akpo*. Examples are *Akpobasa-a* (‘world has no end’ or ‘there is life everywhere’), *Avuakporaye* (‘each person has his/her own life or destiny’) and *Onovughakpo* (‘who can fathom the mysteries of life?’). See Michael Y. Nabofa, ‘Akpo: Urhobo Ontology of Life and the Universe,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 122–142: 123, 126 and 140.

between *akpo* and *erivwin*.⁷²⁷ It is ‘a vast world inhabited by a large group of nature-spirit forces [that is *edjo*], some benign, others cruel and dangerous [whose] friendship must be achieved for the welfare of the community.’⁷²⁸ The human beings inhabit *akpo*, the *edjo* dwell in the stepped-down *erivwin* while the abode of the spirits of the ancestors is *erivwin*.⁷²⁹ If *erivwin* is thought of in terms ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ then the ‘stepped-down’ section belongs to the ‘bad part’ where ‘bad’ persons including wizards, witches and those who suffered abominable death like falling from palm tree, death arising from swollen body and small pox dwell. They do not qualify for *erhurhe* and do not go to the good *erivwin*.

Therefore, the Urhobo understand the proper burial as necessary to attract the favour of the deceased because it ushers its spirit into *erivwin* where it could assume the status of an ancestor and choose a better lot in the next life. Otherwise, it could end up in a less deserving place as *erierhi r’osuosuo* (‘a wandering spirit’).⁷³⁰ In other words, proper burial procures peaceful rest for the deceased in *erivwin* and peaceful living for his/her kinsmen in *akpo*. Thus the prerequisites for the departed spirits to enter *erivwin* include good moral quality of life by the deceased and the quality of funeral rituals given by his/her family.⁷³¹

With the concepts of birth, death, re-birth or re-incarnation, the Urhobo explain the movement of a soul between *akpo* and *erivwin*. Daniel Odafetite Riamela observed that the Urhobo concept of reincarnation differs from that of the Hindus which include the

⁷²⁷ Ekeh, ‘Urhobo World View,’ 30.

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ Ibid; Nabofa, ‘Reincarnation,’ 291.

⁷³¹ Ekeh, ‘Urhobo Worldview,’ 30.

escape to Nirvana and reward/punishment notion of rebirth to higher/lower caste.⁷³²

Michael Y. Nabofa also differentiated between the concepts of life after death in the traditional Urhobo and Christian thoughts. He clarified that the Urhobo have no concept of bodily resurrection in the future, but of an immediate and spiritual resurrection which makes the deceased to appear to relations, haunt the enemies, witness their burial, live with and observe their family members for three months before final departure to *erivwi*.⁷³³ Imasogie emphasised a similar point generally for Africans. He wrote:

The African does not have a clearly developed eschatology when all the dead will be judged. In fact, the African doctrines of ancestral worship and transmigration sometimes appear contradictory when one does not read between the lines. What is clear is that there is an afterlife and that each deceased spirit is judged on the basis of his earthly character. There is also the strong belief that the deceased may become an ancestral spirit provided he lived a good earthly existence and the proper funeral rites have been performed by his children and next of kin.⁷³⁴

The implication for the Urhobo is that death has not ended the relationship and the dead is still active and in a spiritually higher position. The Urhobo therefore make ritual efforts to maintain a peaceful and cordial relationship with the dead.

7.2.2 The *ugboma* ('body') and *erhi* ('soul/spirit')

To the Urhobo mind set, the human beings are composed of the physical and spiritual entities which are the *ugboma* ('body') and *erhi* ('soul/spirit')⁷³⁵ and *erhi* could function consciously outside *ugboma*. According to Nabofa, *erhi* departs from a person at death to perform the spiritual acts of watching, visiting and haunting mentioned above.⁷³⁶

⁷³² Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death*, 10–11.

⁷³³ Nabofa, 'Reincarnation,' 290–292.

⁷³⁴ Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 63.

⁷³⁵ Nabofa, 'Reincarnation,' 289.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, 290–291; Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, 25–26.

In Urhobo thought, the deceased could be reborn (reincarnated) and could choose what to become, but the rebirth is within the nuclear or extended family. The members of the family could also identify the reincarnated personality through divination or notice of similar body marks and/or life style. Within the Urhobo concept of reincarnation, an *erierhi r'osuosuo* ('wandering soul') could enter a pregnant woman and be reborn as a 'born to die' child. If it is noticed, such a child is given names like *oji* ('thief') or *mudiake* ('stay with your earthly parents') in order to humiliate the soul, to make it change its plan and to lead normal life.⁷³⁷

7.2.3 The *agberen/erhuerhe* ('ritual burial')

The *erhuerhe* is the Urhobo ritual burial. It is an elaborate ceremony which may take place immediately after death of a person or later if the children or the extended family members are not financially ready. The Urhobo believe that without *erhuerhe*, the deceased is not properly introduced to *erivwin*, and therefore will not find rest⁷³⁸ and 'the restless spirit of the dead can be angry with his earthly relatives who did not consider it necessary to initiate him into his rest among his people in the ancestral world.'⁷³⁹ The functions of *erhuerhe* therefore are to usher the departed spirit into *urhoro* ('the abode of rest'), prevent it from wandering about and promote the deceased to ancestor status. According to Erhueh, the Urhobo avoid calling the name of the

⁷³⁷ Nabofa, 'Reincarnation,' 293–294.

⁷³⁸ Erivwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 197. For reasons of delayed *erhuerhe*, see R. E. Bradbury, 'The Benin Kingdom; the Ishan; the Northern Edo; the Urhobo; and Isoko of the Niger Delta,' *Ethnographic Survey of Africa: West Africa, Part XIII*. Daryll Forde, ed. 127–205 (London: International African Institute, 1957): 159.

⁷³⁹ Oyibo, *Death and Burial of the Dead*, 26.

departed for fear of being harmed until the *erhuerhe* is performed and the spirit has rested.⁷⁴⁰

Most Urhobo scholars⁷⁴¹ regard *erhuerhe* ('ritual burial') as the 'second' burial, the first being *ebrovwiotor* ('interment'). Riamela, however, disagreed with the terms 'first' or 'second burial.' Instead, he expressed that Urhobo burial is one, but in various stages which culminates in the *erhuerhe r'orivwin* ('the rite of installation as ancestor/ancestress').⁷⁴² Riamela's point is tenable when one considers the factor of the tropical climate and the lack of mortuaries among the Urhobo in the early times as the main reason for the *ebrovwiotor* to sequentially take precedence over the *erhuerhe*. Otherwise, the *ebrovwiotor* could be delayed and performed along with the *erhuerhe*. Ekeh observed that with the presence of modern amenities of transportation and electric refrigeration in mortuaries, the usual gap between the *ebrovwiotor* and *erhuerhe* is reducing.⁷⁴³ Erhueh separated the burials into two on the bases of the activities carried out by stating that the 'first' is the period of mourning and interring the physical body while the 'second' is celebration or initiation of the spiritual body.⁷⁴⁴

The use of the terms, 'first' and 'second' for Urhobo burial is confusing because the Urhobo people themselves are not in the habit of saying they have done the first and now preparing for the second burial. If they have interred and not yet performed the ritual aspect, they will simply say they have not buried their father or mother. As noted

⁷⁴⁰ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 268.

⁷⁴¹ Queen Okoroleju, 'Traditional Burials and their Problems in Agbarha Clan.' B. A. Long essay (Abraka: Delta State University, 2000), 21; Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 268–271.

⁷⁴² Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death*, 32–33.

⁷⁴³ Peter Palmer Ekeh, 'A Profile of Urhobo Culture.' in *Studies in Urhobo culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 1–50: 48.

⁷⁴⁴ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 269. Respondent 10 gave an example in which the mock coffin was buried ritually on the seventh day after the interment of the real corpse.

earlier in chapter three, section 3.11.1, the concept of burial among the Urhobo conveys more than the notion of the *ebrovwiotor* but the *erhuẹrhe* performed to usher the spirit of the deceased into *erivwin*. A respondent explained,

Most times, the corpse is buried before the actual burial ceremony like my father's case. When my father died, I was in the village as a teacher. Before I returned from the village, they have already buried the corpse. The immediate family can always do that. Then they will ask the children whether they are ready to 'bury' their father or mother immediately.⁷⁴⁵

The meaning is that the interment is not the complete burial but only the beginning and that the Urhobo burial is not considered done until the ritual aspect is completed. To demonstrate the incompleteness of a burial with only interment and no rituals, Ekeh explained that there could be a ritual burial of the body parts (finger nails and hairs) of someone who died abroad and the corpse has been buried there.⁷⁴⁶ Another point that underlies the inadequacy of separating Urhobo burial into two events is that Urhobo marriage ceremony is also performed in stages and yet is not addressed as the first, second or third marriage. Therefore, Urhobo burial is a process that has stages.

Nevertheless, from another perspective, the identification of *erhuẹrhe* as 'second burial' could be appropriate because it could mean 'to repair' or 'to make perfect.'⁷⁴⁷ It arises in a situation whereby the children of the deceased were young but the family performed the burial for them. The children, having become adults and financially buoyant could decide to perform *erhuẹrhe* for their parents.⁷⁴⁸ It could also be that something which was not properly done at the initial stage when the person died is now readressed. For example, if *ẹvwe ehun* was not killed, then *erhuẹrhe* becomes the occasion to amend the rites.⁷⁴⁹ Another tenable basis for calling *erhuẹrhe* the 'second burial' is its use to

⁷⁴⁵ Respondent 21.

⁷⁴⁶ Ekeh, 'A Profile of Urhobo Culture,' 46–48.

⁷⁴⁷ Respondent 5.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

distinguish the persons who qualify for installation as ancestors from others who do not. This categorization then becomes identification of ranks of the deceased. Queen Okoroleju, who wrote her long essay on traditional burial of Agbarha-Urhobo, noted that not all deceased are given *erhuẹrhe*. She listed the criteria for qualifying for *erhuẹrhe* as including full maturity, good death, and one who has performed *erhuẹrhe* for his/her own parents.⁷⁵⁰ ‘Maturity’ is understood in term of longevity. Thus, the individual whose parents are still alive or who has not performed the traditional burial for his/her late parent is not qualified for *erhuẹrhe*, except the children perform that of the grandparent before their parent. Childlessness and bad deaths will also rob the deceased of *erhuẹrhe*.⁷⁵¹ The equivalent of *erhuẹrhe* in Edo is *ukomwen* (‘planting’ or ‘installation’).⁷⁵²

The deceased’s children are the most suitable to perform *erhuẹrhe* as the Urhobo place high value on procreation and especially having male children. The importance of bearing children is accentuated in *Omonose Saga*, an event that occurred in Agbon-Urhobo about 1934 in which the wife of an impotent man was transferred to a member of his family who could raise children through her for him. The story became a tragedy, as the aggrieved impotent man resorted to killing his ex-wife, her new husband and many others who planned or supported the re-allocation of the wife. According to Ekeh, the event ‘challenged the morality of the extended family’s claim of rights over an individual’s life and possessions.’⁷⁵³ Nevertheless, it shows the Urhobo family’s regard for having biological children. It also explains the Urhobo concept of *Aye r’Ekru*

⁷⁵⁰Okoroleju, ‘Traditional burials and their problems in Agbarha clan,’ 21–22.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Osadolor Imasogie, *African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1985), 37.

⁷⁵³ Peter P. Ekeh, ‘The Omonose Saga in Okpara Folk History,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 577–586: 578.

(‘family wife’)⁷⁵⁴ which could be literally invoked because the Urhobo believe that a woman is married into a family not just an individual. Therefore, if a man is impotent or dies, his wife could be transferred to another member in the family line. The Urhobo view of family goes beyond death to include the ‘immortal life after death.’⁷⁵⁵ Therefore the Urhobo understand *erhuerhe* as the the responsibility of the living for the ‘living-dead’⁷⁵⁶ members and to avoid it amounts to irresponsibility.

7.2.4 The *ihurhe* (‘ancestor’s shrine’) in Idjerhe

In Idjerhe-Urhobo, the word *esemo* and *inimọ* may not be as common as *ihurhe*.⁷⁵⁷ The *ihurhe* is made of cowries weaved together to form a bunch around an ancestral stick called *ovwo/opho*⁷⁵⁸ and/or the skull of *evwe siobo uvwevwi* (‘the goat used for the burial concluding ceremony’) of the person it intends to stand for. It is a symbol of ancestral representation through which deceased parents are appeased or served as *Ihurhe-ose* (father) or *Ihurhe-oni* (mother). Appeasement occurs when there is a domesticated offence against a family member within the jurisdiction of the ancestors. Beyond the occasional appeasement in times of crisis, there is also *eye ego*, which is a regular annual service to the ancestors. The family members gather to pour libation of drinks and the blood of sacrificed animals like goat into the ancestral shrines. Hence it is regarded as ‘ancestor’s worship’ by Eriwo, Ilega and others as mentioned earlier in chapter five, section 5.5.

⁷⁵⁴ Onoawarie Edevbie, ‘Comments: *Aye r’Ekru* and the Omonose Complex,’ in *Studies In Urhobo Culture*, ed. Peter P. Ekeh, 587–595.

⁷⁵⁵ Erhueh, *Vatican II: Image of God in Man*, 271–272.

⁷⁵⁶ John S. Mbiti defines the ‘living dead’ as a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits (see John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 25).

⁷⁵⁷ The concept of *Ihurhe* is present in Oghara-Urhobo as well as confirmed by respondent 8.

⁷⁵⁸ This stick is called *akomu* in Agbon (Respondent 12).

The *Ihurhe* is placed in a flat plate on a table at one corner of the house close to a window or door. Men serve *Ihurhe-ose* while women serve *Ihurhe-oni* which does not possess a separate figure but subsumed in the former. Therefore, when *Ihurhe-oni* is to be served, only an empty saucer will be placed before the server and the spirit of the mother is invoked.⁷⁵⁹ The presence of *ihurhe* satisfies the spiritual and emotional needs of family members and this satisfaction compensates for their grief of bereavement because although they lost the person through death, they have gained him or her back as ancestor or ancestress. In addition, the hope of every living Urhobo person is to join the ancestors in *erivwin-r'orua* at death. Hence for instance, in a burial of an old woman, they could sing, *nene, yere baba kevwę o* ('grandma, greet grandpa for me o'), which is the expression of the belief that the grandma is going to where the grand pa is and the others will join in their times.

7.2.5 The *erivwin-r'orua* ('spiritual abode of the extended family')

The Urhobo believe that the socio-geopolitical arrangement in *akpo* is similar to what obtains in *erivwin*, but in a spiritual sense. In other words, *akpo* is a physical duplicate of the spiritual layout in *erivwin* geographically, administratively, and otherwise. Therefore when a person dies in *akpo* side of the universe, he/she simply translates to the corresponding section in *erivwin*.⁷⁶⁰ Michael P. Adogbo pensively explained this concept thus,

Erivwi has also the same geographical features as the land of the living; the only difference being that it is invisible. It is sometimes construed to be under the world. The social organisation of the spirit world is patterned on that of the living. The population is organised in lineage families and households. It is believed that there is a structure with kings, chiefs and elders playing major roles while children and women assume their

⁷⁵⁹ Respondent 5.

⁷⁶⁰ Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death*, 10.

subordinate roles. The position of an individual depends on how well he had lived in the physical world.⁷⁶¹

The equivalent of the concept of *erivwin r'orua* in the Edo/Bini perspective was also expressed by Imasogie as the 'community of the departed family members'⁷⁶² and of the ethnic group⁷⁶³ to which the deceased is incorporated through symbolic ritual burial. As Imasogie further revealed, among the Africans, the earthly feature is always perceived to be a mirror of the spiritual reality like the bureaucratic system of governance leading to the concept of the deity in term of 'bureaucratic monotheism.'⁷⁶⁴

S. G. A. Onibere also made reference to the concept of the earthly family representatives in the spiritual abode among the Iri people of Isoko, the close neighbours to the Urhobo culturally. In his treatment of the relationship between destiny and the problem of bedwetting among the Iri section of Isoko, Onibere stated that the people are of the view that,

Those in *eri* [Isoko version of *erivwin*] are arranged in families; and that all members of a family participate when the victim receives his destiny. It is thus fairly logical to conclude that that there is hardly a time when a particular family will have no representative in *eri*, especially as the usual traffic between this and the next world finds exemplification in the people's concept of reincarnation.⁷⁶⁵

The concept of *erivwin-r'roua* makes the Urhobo to deal carefully with family members. They have a saying, *me v'oye erivwin ovo* ('we both have one common ancestral spiritual abode'),⁷⁶⁶ especially when a member of the family feels cheated. The

⁷⁶¹ Adogbo, 'The Signification of Rituals of Destiny among the Urhobo,' 83; Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 116–117.

⁷⁶² Osadolor Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 58.

⁷⁶³ Imasogie, *African Traditional Religion*, 36.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 26, 34–35, 40, 58–59. For the similar idea among the Yorùbá, see Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yorùbá Belief* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1962), 200.

⁷⁶⁵ S. G. A. Onibere, 'Èrevẹ: Bedwetting Concept among the Iri People,' *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 16, no. 1 (Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nigeria) Limited, June, 1984), 3–14:11–12.

⁷⁶⁶ Riamela, *The Concept of Life After Death*, 10.

belief is that such a reminder can call the erring member to order. The Ashanti people of Ghana expressed similar concept of family solidarity in their view of ancestors and life after death, that one day when an Ashanti person joins the ancestors, they will demand for the account of his or her conduct towards the kinsmen.⁷⁶⁷

7.2.6 The *ɛvwe ehun* ('waist goat')

The rituals associated with the *ɛvwe ehun* celebrate the fertility of the deceased person. The ritual is performed by a senior member of the family rather than by a traditional priest because it is intrinsically linked to the crucial issue of procreation – and therefore of generational continuity – within the family. During the night-wake phase of the ceremony a goat is sacrificed in recognition that the deceased had been the parent of a child or children when he/she was alive, and so this rite is omitted at the burial of anyone who died childless.⁷⁶⁸ After the goat has been slaughtered, its blood is smeared upon the waist of the deceased as a mark of honour to signify that the waist contributed to the numerical growth of the family. The ritual is therefore performed for fertility to continue in the family. A respondent explained that the waist of mothers is respected during marriage ceremonies as well because ‘the bridegroom is asked to pay certain amount of money as *igho-ugberarhe* (‘price of warming the mother’s waist’ or ‘for lying by fire after childbirth’) for the waist to the mother of the bride.’⁷⁶⁹ It is paid only to bride’s mother not father.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁷ Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 115.

⁷⁶⁸ Childless here means the deceased never had a child in life. If he/she had but lost the child by death before his/her own death, the family will sacrifice *ɛvwe ehun* in the burial.

⁷⁶⁹ Respondent 12.

⁷⁷⁰ Respondent 5.

Chinese burial also has fertility rites. An example is the rite of dotting the *dien chu* ('ancestral tablet') with cock's blood. The *dien chu kan* ('ancestral plate writer') who is always a man represents the *yang* ('male substance') while 'the cock's blood as a life force' becomes the 'vitalizing agent' or *yin* ('female substance') to produce *li-liang* ('vigor') which transfers from the deceased to the descendants.⁷⁷¹ In Urhobo rituals, blood or red colour could represent life, fertility, mystery or danger.⁷⁷² In *evwe ehun* ritual, it certainly represents life and fertility.

Apart from being like a trophy for the deceased, *evwe ehun* serves as a unique fellowship meal because its meat is shared among the key arms of the extended family. The Jews have the *labra'ah* ('meal of comfort')⁷⁷³ and the Chinese have *Ching Ming* Festival or Ancestors' Food⁷⁷⁴ all of which are related to meal of solidarity among the relations of the dead and/or with the dead either during the burial or after but the Urhobo have more than one funeral meal and the *evwe ehun* is uniquely significant. The head of *evwe ehun* is cooked separately in the night before interment and eaten by the *onojoso/onega* ('the family appointed chairman of the occasion') and few family elders. The remaining part is either cooked or shared raw later, the following morning, after the interment. The sharing is in the following pattern; one rear leg with tail and half of other important internal organs such as liver, lungs and kidney is given to the senior son and his siblings. One foreleg is given to the in-laws; the other foreleg is shared among the mother's side of the deceased. The waist of the goat is given to the women of the family.

⁷⁷¹ Chen, 'A Christian Response to Chinese Ancestor Practices in Taiwan,' 129.

⁷⁷² Onobrakpeya, 'Color Symbolism in Urhobo Art, 95.

⁷⁷³ Geoffrey Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial: An Introductory Survey of the Historical Development of Christian Burial Rites* (London: SPCK, 1977), 4. The *labra'ah* is made of lentils, and eggs, the round shapes symbolises 'the revolving wheel of fortune.' The meal is served to only men and with eleven cups of wine. Two are drunk before, five during and three after the meal and the remaining three later. Some of the cups are for the benediction and consolation of the mourners; others are for the synagogue and memory of Rabbi Gamaliel.

⁷⁷⁴ Chen, 'A Christian Response to Chinese Ancestor Practices in Taiwan,' 347ff.

Half of the second rear leg goes to the *onojoso*, the second half with the remaining portions of the meat is divided among the male and female unmarried members of the family and any other people present at the occasion.⁷⁷⁵ The *evwe ehun* is cooked and served in the form of *ukodo r'evwe* ('goat meat pepper soup cooked with yam and unripe plantain'), a delicacy that many Urhobo people grew up with and have come to cherish. The portion eaten by each individual is therefore, very small, but its consumption conveys a significant meaning of family unity and continuity—that the participants belong to the family and have the good intention of its continuity.

There is however occasional interference which undermines the factor of family unity in the process of sacrificing *evwe ehun*. This phenomenon as explained by a respondent makes participation in the meal a matter of force than fellowship. For instance, after killing *evwe ehun* a group of family youths may forcefully take it away. They however return the head and other internal organs already cooked to for the family elders, then the main body is not available to be shared in the traditionally acceptable manner as indicated above. The deceased's family is however satisfied that since the goat has been slaughtered; the efficacy of the sacrifice is not affected. It is with this kind of situation that one can understand an Urhobo saying that *bri-hwo rię evwe ehun?* ('How many people do eat waist goat?'). The implication is that 'waist goat is not for all but for family elders and few youth who can struggle for it.'⁷⁷⁶

A respondent had a complete Urhobo traditional burial for his father in 1958 but a Christian burial for his mother in 2000 because by then he and the late mother had become Baptist Christians. Therefore there was a slight change in the traditions

⁷⁷⁵ Respondents 1 and 5.

⁷⁷⁶ Respondent 5.

performed for the mother different from that of the father. One example is that *evwe r'inuu* ('cleansing goat')⁷⁷⁷ ritual was omitted because they have come to believe that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed them from their sins. Nevertheless, the traditional ritual of *evwe ehun* was still performed as a symbol that the woman had children.⁷⁷⁸ When asked what would happen if the *evwe ehun* was not to be killed, a respondent from Idjerhe said, 'Ah! Something bad will happen to the children. But if everything is done well, all the people will be satisfied. They will pray for the children. If the children were poor before, they will become rich.'⁷⁷⁹ Another respondent from Agbon explained that 'some children may fall sick as a result because the spirit of their father or mother will worry them.'⁷⁸⁰

Another respondent was strongly on the side of Urhobo tradition as he narrated the account of his recent disagreement over the issue of *evwe ehun* with a Christian pastor whose ecclesial community was not mentioned. He narrated,

Last month, I attended the burial of my late father's wife. When the *evwe ehun* was brought out, the pastor said no goat should be killed in a Christian burial. I said we have tradition and cannot cancel the tradition. The only thing is that we should not add the sacrifices. The *evwe ehun* is now called family goat. When you bury a human being, you will not just park and go home, you will eat. The goat will not be slaughtered against the wall as it used to be. Neither are we going to use the goat's blood to touch the waist of the deceased. Now that Christianity has come, we will slaughter the goat for eating purpose.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁷ The *evwe r'inuu* ('goatsacrifice for removing dirt') is purification/cleansing sacrifice and to drive away all evil spirits and forces associated with death. Respondent 5 stated that,

It is usually performed on the seventh day after the burial. Very early in the morning, a designated member of the family, dressed with untidy clothes simply kills the goat and the blood is not smeared on any particular *edjo* or sacred object. Then the goat meat is cooked for the members of the family. After eating, those who have not bathed or changed their clothes for seven days because of mourning can now clean up.

⁷⁷⁸ Respondent 21.

⁷⁷⁹ Respondent 2.

⁷⁸⁰ Respondent 10.

⁷⁸¹ Respondent 7. The blood stain on the house wall serves as public announcement and evidence because not all people may witness the slaughtering of *evwe ehun* or the staining of the deceased's waist with its blood.

When asked ‘What if the goat is not slaughtered and another kind of meat is used to serve the people?’ he responded, ‘They want to eat goat! If you like, bring one hundred chicken, they want to eat goat.’⁷⁸²

Whether done rightly or wrongly, the DSBC regard Urhobo *evwe ehun* as a ‘pagan’ practice and it forms a major factor that made the DSBC to reject Urhobo traditional burial. All the reasons that the DSBC advanced for its stand are discussed in chapter six, section 6.2. On the *evwe ehun*, a Principal Officer who is also from Idjerhe, explained that,

From time immemorial, there have been differences between Christian burials and pagan burials or traditional burials which include slaughtering of goats, shooting of guns, and other burial rites according to Urhobo tradition. Perhaps, when you interview some of our chiefs they will tell you that you need to slaughter goat called *evwe ehun* and do some other unchristian things at night. Those things were unacceptable to us Christians. We do not want to do those things because we believe that Christ died for us and we do not need to make sacrifices anymore. That was why we fight the battle and struggle with them that Christians who died should be buried in a specific way without traditional rites like slaughtering of goats, sacrifices to the shrines, to the fore fathers and shooting of guns and a lot of other things they do which go against our faith.⁷⁸³

This Officer⁷⁸⁴ and another respondent⁷⁸⁵ nonetheless admitted that the Urhobo Baptists still combine the Urhobo traditional practices with the church burial. When asked whether, with the measures taken, the church burials are now free of all pagan rituals and traditional religiously-inspired social activities and whether the pastors are no more under pressure as before, the Officer answered;

The presence is still there. People always want to go back to do things the way they are used to. Even after daytime burial has been accepted as against night burial, some people still go back in the evening, especially those who

⁷⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Respondent 14.

have in-laws, to dance throughout the night. The church is no longer involved in such activities any more.⁷⁸⁶

He agreed that the Urhobo attach so much importance to the *evwe ehun* ritual that the refusal to observe it could cause trouble for a Christian with his extended family members. He therefore suggested that Christians circumvented this problem by providing money with which their extended family could buy the *evwe ehun*. In this way they could still provide for the rite, without directly lifting their hands to it. The Principal Officer thinks that the view of *evwe ehun* as appreciation for the family is good but the aspect of using its blood for sacrifice to the dead is bad and unchristian.⁷⁸⁷ Two other respondents who are a Baptist pastor and a deacon agreed with the views expressed by the officer

Nevertheless, an interview respondent identified the slaughtering of *evwe ehun* as the most important aspect that completes an Urhobo burial.⁷⁸⁸ All other respondents but one, who is non-Urhobo,⁷⁸⁹ confirmed the prominent place of *evwe ehun* in Urhobo burial. Therefore, since *evwe ehun* is such an important feature in the socio-cultural context of Urhobo burial, this thesis asks if its value and those of *sakpregodi* and *erhuerhe* can be contextualized for the Urhobo Baptists, instead of condemning them without adequate explanation or substitution.

It is evident that until the present time (2012), the Urhobo (including Urhobo Baptists) funeral context still entails the slaughtering of *evwe ehun*, which, according to a

⁷⁸⁶ Respondent 3.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁸ Respondent 5.

⁷⁸⁹ Respondent 26.

respondent cited above, some modern Urhobo prefer to call the *evwe r'ekru* ('family goat').⁷⁹⁰ The slaughtering of this goat is also viewed as a mark of responsibility by the Urhobo people. A respondent said the children of the deceased are mocked if the *erhuerhe* is not performed or the *evwe ehun* is not slaughtered.⁷⁹¹ The experience of another respondent confirmed this assertion. When asked how it will affect his late father if the *erhuerhe* is not performed, he answered that he really would not know how it will affect him. But the people in the village will look down on the children and say 'their father died and they could not bury him.' He continued, 'it is a taboo. If anything evil happens within the family, people will say it is because we did not bury our father.'⁷⁹² Thus the relevance of *erhuerhe* among the Urhobo begs the question, should the Urhobo Baptists present themselves as irresponsible to their culture in order to be acceptable in a Baptist church?

From the foregoing, the functions of Urhobo rite of *evwe ehun* include the worship of ancestors as the deity of fertility because there is no other *edjo* involved directly or indirectly. It also serves as a mark of honour to the deceased and appreciation to his or her family. The *evwe ehun* rite further fosters unity and continuity among family members, and between the physical and the spiritual worlds, constituting the maintenance of order and thus preventing calamity. The sacrificial victim, goat meat, being a traditional delicacy also makes it readily acceptable to Urhobo people. Using Malinowski's functionalism theory to view *evwe ehun*, it is clear that it helps to unite the family members thereby enhancing the sense of their commonality. However, the uncritical attitude of the DSBC coupled with inadequate understanding of such ritual symbol has resulted to all ritual practices being discarded.

⁷⁹⁰ Respondent 7.

⁷⁹¹ Respondent 8.

⁷⁹² Respondent 19.

7.2.7 The *esakpegodi* ('fourth/fifth generation celebration–great-great grandchild')

Also related to the twinned questions of procreation and familial identity are the practices associated with the *esakpegodi*. This term refers to the great-great grandchild of a person, whether that person is deceased or alive, either from the father's or mother's lineage. During burial, the *esakpegodi* is highly honoured but that honour actually reverts to the deceased as a mark of a full and accomplished life. The *esakpegodi* is dressed in a special way with white top and a red band around the head.⁷⁹³ This attire echoes that of the deceased: the corpse of one who has lived to see his/her *esakpegodi* is dressed in red cloth decorated with beaded cowries.⁷⁹⁴ The *esakpegodi* must be informed of the death and the burial plan of his/her great-great grandparent and the messages must be accompanied with gifts of food items and money. On the day of burial, the *esakpegodi* is carried shoulder high to the place where the corpse is laid in state where he/she will be seated with a carpet of cloth under his/her feet because they are treated as special and sacred children for that purpose and their feet must not touch the ground. When it is time to go for interment, the *esakpegodi* is carried again as before. The carriers dance with him/her while the participants at the ceremony continue to spray money⁷⁹⁵ on the *esakpegodi*. Thus *esakpegodi* is treated like a king. The family members are careful not to offend an *esakpegodi* during burial or else, the ceremony could come to a halt until he/she is appeased before the ceremony could continue.

According to Idjerhe-Urhobo tradition, a person is not expected to see his or her *esakpegodi*. Therefore the people can only hear the news that a great-great grand child is born to them but the tradition forbids them from seeing the child. When asked for the

⁷⁹³ Respondent 5.

⁷⁹⁴ Respondent 9.

⁷⁹⁵ The spraying of money is a common phenomenon in Nigeria. It is a sign of appreciation. See Zoma, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 39 – 40.

reason behind this taboo, a respondent from Idjerhe said, it may have a connection with the Benin tradition that the Oba forbids to see physically his heir apparent for fear that it may quicken his death. In the same way, this respondent added that though the Urhobo do rejoice at the news of the birth of a great-great grandchild, being a mark of long and fruitful life, they believe that the sight of the child by the great-great grand parent may speed up his/her death. He illustrated though not accurately with the biblical Simeon who saw Christ in the Temple and surrendered to death.⁷⁹⁶ Another respondent from Oghara shared similar opinion on the linking of the tradition that forbids a person to see his/her *esakpegodi* with Benin, but this respondent added that with Christianity and modernity, the practice has become outdated.⁷⁹⁷

The *esakpegodi* rite is unique to the Urhobo and serves to connect and strengthen the inter-generational chord. Any child who performs as *esakpegodi* is bound to keep the experience as a treasure, thus cherishing and nurturing his or her link with either paternal or maternal ancestral root.

7.2.8 The *erhierhi-r'osuosuo* ('wandering spirits')

Idjerhe-Urhobo has the concept of *erhierhi-r'osuosuo* that some spirits wander until properly buried if they belong to deceased human beings. But if they belong to the deities, they need to be pacified through sacrifices.⁷⁹⁸ A respondent from Olomu called the wandering spirits *ihwrahwrahwra* ('the roving/unsettled spirits').⁷⁹⁹ Nabofa described these spirits in term of deities as *edjoerivwin* ('spirits of the spirit world'). They are often associated with awful situations that have to do with sacred/evil forests

⁷⁹⁶ Respondent 5.

⁷⁹⁷ Respondent 9.

⁷⁹⁸ Respondent 5.

⁷⁹⁹ Respondent 14.

where the remains of those who died abnormally are disposed off.⁸⁰⁰ They are perceived as wild, cruel and ugly in contrast with *ɛdɔramɛ* ('water spirits') which are said to be 'beautiful, handsome, benevolent and custodians of wealth.'⁸⁰¹ Nabofa stated that *ɛdɔerivwin* 'are usually associated with menace, disorder, ugliness, illness, and mental disharmony.'⁸⁰² Consequently, people can be described as 'beautiful as *ɛdɔramɛ*' or 'as ugly as *ɛdɔerivwin*.' Nabofa however pointed out that *ɛdɔramɛ* could as well cause misfortune if offended.⁸⁰³

With the common saying, 'may his/her gentle soul rest in peace,' it is the desire of the Idjerhe-Urhobo that the soul of their deceased will gain access to the good part of *erivwin* and enjoy full rest. They therefore seek to achieve this goal by painstakingly performing a proper burial. An important point to note of the Urhobo attitude to the *erhierhi-r'osuoso* is that, whenever sacrifices are offered to ancestors, and other good spirits and deities during funerals and other ceremonies, portions are usually reserved for the wandering spirits as well less they disturb the activities of the good ones. This Urhobo traditional principle of caring for the unwanted spirits as a way to maximally enjoy the good ones amounts to a method of creating equilibrium in the spiritual world. And it could be useful if applied terrestrially to modern Nigerian society where unemployed youths constitute security risk to other members of the society who think they are comfortable.

In summary, this chapter has opened the exploration of Urhobo burial tradition and found that Urhobo myth of the origin of death is thematically similar to a number of

⁸⁰⁰ Nabofa, 'Urhobo Art and Religious Belief,' in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet*, ed. Perkins Foss, 37-45: 41.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

other people's myths, especially in understanding death as resulting from carelessness of human or mythic beings, which in essence is a dog in Urhobo's folklore. The myth however serves to teach certain moral lessons. It is also evident that Urhobo people value the maintenance of a 'constant good relationship with the transcendental' spirits including the spirit of the ancestors to which the living hopes to join at death. To achieve this goal, they therefore seek harmony between *akpo* and *erivwin*, *ugboma* and *erhi* and serve *ihurhe* through symbolic rituals of *erhuerhe*, *evwe ehun* and *sakpregodi* and perform all that is necessary to avoid the menace of *erhierhi-r'osuosuo*. The next chapter therefore continues this exploration by discussing different kinds of death and their corresponding burial methods.

CHAPTER EIGHT–KINDS OF DEATHS AND BURIALS

This chapter describes and analyses deaths and corresponding burial rites of people of different socio-political and economic categories and in different circumstances. It includes the titled and untitled, men and women, ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ wealthy and poor; all of which are adults because a child’s burial attracts no ceremonial ritual, the corpse is simply disposed of. There is a structural overview of the ritual performed in each case. The chapter also explores the significant functions of traditional burial rites for the Urhobo.

8.1 Different Kinds of Deaths and Burials

Among all Urhobo subcultures, a person’s age, gender, socio-political, economic, moral and procreation status do influence the conduct of his/her burial. Therefore, their preference for one condition of life over the other reveals their concepts of a meaningful life and death. Thus the Urhobo traditional burial makes different provision for all socio-cultural classes of people. A respondent from Agbarho-Urhobo subculture stated that,

The decision on how a person is buried depends on his/her status; whether rich, poor, chief, non-chief, or a person without a child. If a non-chief is rich, his burial may be elaborate but a chief’s burial is always elaborate and coded. The poor man will be buried according to the financial power of the family. The burial of a person without a child is not taken very seriously unless he/she was a very rich man. A child too is not given a full burial, except he/she has attained the age of fifteen or sixteen years. A man of fifteen is qualified to marry and is regarded to be a man.⁸⁰⁴

A respondent from Olomu viewed the major dividing line between having and having no children. He said ‘a young person who has no child is buried in a low key. No goat is

⁸⁰⁴ Respondent 21.

slaughtered but his peer groups will be fed. Whereas the one who already has children, though may be young, will enjoy all the burial rites like an old man.⁸⁰⁵

In Idjerhe-Urhobo, a person's status influences the manner of his/her burial. The burial ritual procedure for a king remains a secret but those of other persons whether titled or non-titled, male or female, old or young are publicly known and jointly performed by both the family members and the community. All the burials follow a similar pattern, namely, the preliminaries, the burial and the conclusion. The broadly break down is as follows—The preliminaries: (i) the report of the death to family members, (ii) family meetings and the planning for the burial, (iii) announcement of the burial plan to the public, (iv) collection of funds, printing of programmes and provision of other materials needed. The burial: (i) preparation of the corpse to lie in state, (ii) *atiekpe nunu* ('opening the mouth of the deceased'), (iii) slaughtering of *evwe ehun* ('waist goat'), (iv) presentation of drinks and support to family elders through *onojosọ* ('funeral chairman'), (v) greetings and entertainments, (vi) women singing and dancing round the corpse which lies in state, (vii) *ebrovwiotor* ('interment'), (viii) ceremonial washing by *ihwo ritu ushi* ('the people who dug the grave') and others who touched the dead, (ix) further entertainments. The conclusion: (i) in-laws' greetings, (ii) concluding ceremony and (iii) sharing of deceased's assets.

It may however be difficult to get a clear cut order of traditional burial program like in the church service because many rites can go on simultaneously as a respondent indicated.⁸⁰⁶ For example, under the burial section above items (iii) the slaughtering of *evwe ehun* and (iv) the presentation of drinks and support to family elders do go on

⁸⁰⁵ Respondent 13.

⁸⁰⁶ Respondent 19.

simultaneously while items (v) greetings and entertainments, and (vi) women singing and dancing round the corpse are also done side by side. When some people are at the grave site for item (vii) *ebrovwiotor*, others are still engaged in the entertainment going on in another corner. In addition, the number of days, animals, rituals, money or persons involved differs from person to person and from category to category, and which also affects the process in each case. Certain details are examined below.

8.2 The burial of *Ovie* ('a King')

The death and burial of *ovie* remains a secret among the Ijerhe-Urhobo people. An *olorogun r'ovie* ('palace chief') in Idjerhe, who may have the full knowledge, was not prepared to address this aspect. He only explained that 'no one is allowed to talk about the death of *ovie* and nobody will know until *ovie* is buried, except his *ilorogun* (plural, 'chiefs'), palace members and close relations. There is no public announcement until a new *ovie* is to be enthroned.'⁸⁰⁷ This attitude of mystifying the death and burial of a king is common with other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria who held the concept that kings are gods and therefore do not die. Adjara and Omokri explained that in Urhobo Land, an *ovie* is not expected to eat in public, shake hands, grieve and express anger or see a corpse. In addition, the praise names and insignia of office' with which the Urhobo address their *ovie* convey their concept of the king 'as above all mortals; a most feared, revered and adored leader as well as a bridge between the people and their ancestral spirits.'⁸⁰⁸ The *ovie* is an embodiment of the ancestors of the land. For instance, the Oghara-Urhobo people salute the *ovie* thus, *Uku Oghara nami* ('the wealth of Oghara like a river') three times, and then say *wo su tɔ* ('you will reign and live long'). The

⁸⁰⁷ Respondent 1.

⁸⁰⁸ Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 21.

implication is that the king is no ordinary person, but is like a big river that can not run dry. He is the custodian and dispenser of wealth to his subjects.

The concept of kings as gods or descendants of gods is common in Africa. As a result the Africans avoid saying a king is dead, but have proverbial ways of expressing the king's death. For instance, the Akan of Ghana say 'a great tree has fallen, the fire has died, or he has gone to his village to cure himself,'⁸⁰⁹ the Yorùbá say *Oba waja* ('the king has entered the roof of the house'), the Edo say *owen ghan-ren* ('the sun has set') or *otoṅ rie oghue* ('the soil has accepted the white chalk')⁸¹⁰ while the Ijerhe-Urhobo express it as *Ovie kp'ame* ('the king has gone to the river').⁸¹¹ At the time of writing this thesis however, the *ovie* of Ogharha-Urhobo, His Royal Highness J. B. Umukoro, Oreki II (1929–2011, reigned from 1979), who was a Baptist 'has gone to the river' and the burial rites performed. Only the social and church ceremonies were attended by the public for twenty-one days (Monday 21st November–Sunday 11th December 2011). The secret⁸¹² rites and most of the traditionally cultural and the religious aspects were done unannounced and undisclosed to the public.

8.3 The burial of *Olorogun* ('a Chief')

The burial of *Olorogun* in Idjerhe takes seven to nine days while that of a non-chief takes three to four days.⁸¹³ A respondent included the gender difference in determining the number of days. He said, three days for a woman, five for a man and seven for an

⁸⁰⁹ Catherine I. Godboldte, 'Ancient African Traditional Funeral Ceremonies and the Funeral Ceremonies of Historic African American Church,' Thesis, Temple University (August 1995), 96.

⁸¹⁰ Interview with Stanley Airihenbuwa, Pentecost Cottengham Baptist Church Liverpool, 9 March 2012.

⁸¹¹ Respondent 1.

⁸¹² The secret rites are known to only insiders who consider it sacrilege and offense against the ancestors to disclose them without the royal approval.

⁸¹³ Respondent 1.

olorogun.⁸¹⁴ Another respondent added that ‘a burial may take three months if the deceased has many in-laws.’⁸¹⁵ In the olden days the distinction included the use of a coffin for *olorogun* and a mat for a non-chief.⁸¹⁶ The burial of an *olorogun* is accompanied with the slaughtering of about fifteen goats and one *irhuẹn* (‘native cow’) whereas an average of three goats will suffice for an untitled person. The use of goats and native cow in burial is full of symbolic meanings. Explaining the significance of slaughtering *irhuẹn* for *olorogun*’s burial, a respondent from Oghara said, ‘It is a mark of respect and nobility.’⁸¹⁷

A respondent from Idjerhe gave the list of the fifteen goats for a chief’s burial as arranged below. From this list, the *ẹvwe ehun*, *ẹvwe aghwara* and *ẹvwe si obọ ruwein* which are the second, eleventh and fifteenth respectively are those shared in common with a non-chief. The sacrificial goats are (1), the *ẹvwe okpọ* (‘goat for serving the community ancestors’) (2), the *ẹvwe ehun* (‘waist sacrificial goat’)—parenthood goat’s sacrifice and (3), the *ẹvwe ru rhoro* (‘gate sacrificial goat’—entry to spirit world). Others are (4) the *ẹvwe asodahọ*⁸¹⁸ (‘bathing/cleansing sacrificial goat’ in Idjerhe, *ẹvwe-ahọ* in Abraka,⁸¹⁹ *ẹvwe-uluhu* in Olomu⁸²⁰)—cleansing sacrifice, (5) the *ẹvwe ’kwa kwa* (‘sacrificial goat for the material possessions’), and (6) the *ẹvwe okọ*⁸²¹ (‘casket/mock coffin sacrificial goat’ in Idjerhe, *ẹvwe r’orhuẹrhe* in Olomu,⁸²² *ẹvwe igbudu/okọ* in Orogun⁸²³).

⁸¹⁴ Respondent 4.

⁸¹⁵ Respondent 13.

⁸¹⁶ Respondent 8.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid.

⁸¹⁸ Respondent 1.

⁸¹⁹ Respondent 15.

⁸²⁰ Respondent 13.

⁸²¹ Respondent 1.

⁸²² Respondent 13.

⁸²³ Respondent 20.

Numbers 7–9 are the *evwe miobo* (three ‘salutary goats’), for the community when the celebrants are dancing across the community. Idjerhe respondent explained that, ‘one is killed at the beginning, one in the centre and one at the end of the village/town’ and that ‘these goats are killed and thrown away for the people, mostly youths who can carry them and eat, thus causing much struggles and fights.’⁸²⁴ There are also (10) the *evwe re tu wevwin* (‘goat sacrifice for reaching the home’) and (11) the *evwe aghwara* (‘goat for the burial hut’). Giving few details on the eleventh goat, this respondent narrated,

The *evwe aghwara* is slaughtered on the day the in-laws will come. The last child will perform his/her own ceremony before the arrival of the in-laws. The *aghwara* day is for the senior in-law to perform. Other in-laws would have performed before that day. A mock coffin prepared and placed in the bush for seven days will be placed inside the *aghwara* (‘the burial hut’), and wrapped with *okpo oyibo* (‘white cloth’). The *aghwara* will be dressed with fine *efenudu* (‘velvetine’). The cost and the age of the dressing materials are to show something about the wealth and the age of the departed. While the mock coffin is being prepared in the bush, a foot path is made to the place and a form of gate made at the entrance of the path by putting poles on the two sides and *ohworo* (‘a string’) is tied across as a seal.⁸²⁵

There are three other goats with unclear designations counted as numbers 12–14 before (15), the *evwe si obo ruwevwin* (‘the final goat’).⁸²⁶ Consequent upon this responsibility that is laid upon an Idjerhe-Urhobo chief, the capability of a prospective candidate is examined. The approval of his family is also sought before appointment. In case of death, the procedure of burial is as follows.

8.3.1 The report of the death

An *olorogun r’ovie* explained that, ‘when an *olorogun* dies, there will be a silence, nobody will cry, if you cry or raise any alarm, you will pay a fine.’⁸²⁷ The reason people

⁸²⁴ Respondent 1.

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

are not allowed to cry is because ‘*olorogun* is not an ordinary person, but a great man.’⁸²⁸ Therefore his death cannot be announced by an unauthorised person.⁸²⁹ The authorised person could be from among the children of *olorogun* or a member of *oguediṣon* (‘council of chiefs’). It is a symbol of honour and respect for the office of *olorogun*. It could also be a way of mystifying and surrounding with taboos, the death of *ilorogun* being the next in rank to the *ovie*. In another perspective, the *ilorogun* are expected to be brave and also embodiments of power and authority.⁸³⁰ They too like the *ovie* are not allowed to weep in public or to do a mean job.⁸³¹ The *ilorogun* are expected to be strong in the face of death. Hence, the family members are advised not to cry or weep⁸³² but commit the whole affair to the deceased’s co-chiefs, as co-brave men, who will manage the situation in a matured manner.

In another way, the above narrative shows that the Idjerhe-Urhobo form a culturally and hierarchical society and this hierarchy is reflected in the burial activities. Even, among the *ilorogun* there is further differentiation in ranks, all of which is played out in the burial rituals. Of course, among the Urhobo generally this differential treatment at burial cuts across the divides of the socio-political, moral and gender status of the people.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

⁸³⁰ Some of the appellations given to a chief in Idjerhe-Urhobo are *Olorogun/Okakuro* (‘Chief’), *Abo woroworo/Abo sasasa* (‘Wealthy person with generous heart and open hand’), *Adioghwardakuje* (‘Capable person’), *Ugboborode* (‘the person who has worked hard/hard working person’), *Merian merian* (‘A Judge’), but chiefs do not judge the criminal case of *oji* (‘a thief’). They refer such to the police (Ibid). These designations point to nobility, dignity and responsibility.

⁸³¹ Respondent 7 explained that the Okpe chiefs are not allowed to dance outside except in a hall. That is they cannot afford to behave like a commoner or ordinary person. They do not ride on bicycles, it will be little for them. They do not tap robber, climb palm tree to harvest palm fruit, or climb a house as a builder. They must not enter a pit or do any mean job. If rain meets a chief on the way, he must not run for rain or hide in another person’s shelter. He is expected to take his time and walk majestically to his house since as a chief he must have had many changes of cloth. A chief is expected to have been rich in material wealth. In like manner, all Urhobo chiefs have code of conduct that depicts their nobility.

⁸³² Respondent No. 8 confirms that the people are not allowed to cry or weep when a chief dies in Oghara-Urhobo as well until a set time.

A respondent explained the process of reporting the death of an *olorogun* and the eventual public announcement with a gun salute,

The first step is to go and report with a big goat to the *nokwa* or *ekpe* ('the most senior chief') that a chief dies. Then they will send the people to the compound to confirm that the chief is late. When it is confirmed, the goat will be used to serve *okpo* ('the community ancestral shrine') kept only by the *nokwa*. Only the senior chiefs, not all the chiefs will participate in that sacrifice. After this is done the senior chiefs will arrange for the shooting of two native guns as an announcement that an important figure is dead. It is only after that the family or anybody is allowed to cry.⁸³³

A similar practice is reported by a respondent from Olomu-Urhobo, he said, 'If an *olorogun* dies, certain beads that he/she normally puts on must be removed by an *olorogun*, male for male and female for female, with a certain traditional fee to be paid by the children.'⁸³⁴

8.3.2 The planning for the burial

The differential treatment for the different ranks among the chiefs affects the planning as well. A respondent said,

There are two categories; (1) the burial for *kejekeje*, the one who has passed through the rank and file or has taken all the titles of chieftaincy, that is from *otota* ('speaker') to *onotu* ('warrior') to *okakuro* ('chief') to *ekpe* ('senior chief'), and (2) the burial for the one who has not passed through all the rank and file.⁸³⁵

The planning for the burial opens with a ceremony that culminates in the choice of dates which may be immediate or later, depending on the financial capability of the children and the family members. This schedule may also be affected by the age or the availability of the principal persons who may be responsible for the burial. For example there may be a delay in the burial if the children are too young⁸³⁶ or are far away, except the family decides otherwise. The factor of the children being too young may not arise in

⁸³³ Respondent 1 and 5.

⁸³⁴ Respondent 13.

⁸³⁵ Respondents 1 and 5.

⁸³⁶ R. E. Bradbury explained this factor and others that may cause the delay of ritual burial as mentioned earlier in section 4.2.2.

an Idjerhe chief's burial since the condition of the children must have been considered and it is most likely that a person must have responsible children to qualify as a chief. In the absence of any cause for delay, the burial proper takes off almost immediately.

8.3.3 The burial

The Idjerhe-Urhobo traditional burial as discussed earlier in chapter seven, section 7.2.3 consists of both the *ebrovwiotor* and the *erhuerhe* which other scholars have termed the 'first' and 'second' burials respectively. Respondents from Idjerhe-Urhobo enumerated the process of burial of a *kejekeje* ('high ranking chief'),

If it is the first category, the family will present *udi ugwhoro* ('permission drink') in form of *ogogoro* ('native gin') with monetary wedge to the chiefs. In those days the monetary wedge is two shillings, but now it can be any amount. After this presentation, the chiefs will agree with the family that the burial process can proceed. If the late chief has taken *onotu* ('the warrior') title before he died, the chiefs will send two *onotu* ('the warriors') one from *uduaka* and the other from *udurhie* to go and decorate the corpse (*uduaka* and *udurhie* are the two arms of *idjerhe* clan). Each of the warriors will put *ughworho* ('eagle's feather') on the cap on the head of the corpse, *uduaka* on one side and *udurhie* on the other. This decoration shows that the late person was an important figure. It commands respect, and the children cannot play around the place anyhow. The late chief dressed with his full regalia and the special decoration on his head will be placed on the bed in the house. The work of the *onotus* is for a price which includes one bottle of hot drink, money and kola. When the *onotus* have come out, the family will entertain the chiefs and all the children of the late chief are expected to support, after which the chiefs will pray for the children and the family before the chiefs will return to their colleagues or homes. This is the first stage and the first assignment of the chiefs. By this, the permission is already given to the family to go ahead.⁸³⁷

The burial of an *olorogun* in Idjerhe involves expenditure and respect of traditional requirements. That explains the reason why the *olorogun*, his children and family must be well-to-do. The children face an enormous task of meeting the demands of both the *oguedion* and the extended family. This respondent clarified further that the children are

⁸³⁷ Respondents 1 and 5.

expected to ceremonially repeat the process of reporting and confirmation of report with the family. The dual process is a necessity because both the *oguediḡon* and the extended family must each give their approval for the burial of *olorogun*. The respondent added that the children may be unduly stressed by some difficult family members. He explained that after interaction with *ilorogun*, the children will go through similar process with the extended family. They will formerly report the demise of their father in three stages; (first that their father is sick, second that the sickness is serious, and third that he has died) and the family will also respond ceremonially by crosschecking the correctness of the reports through their own two emissaries, one each from the mother and father sides.

During this confirmation process, some difficult families can give the children hard nuts to crack by querying them about the circumstances of the death of their son. They will even ask their people to observe the dead body and see how he died whether he was killed by machet or club.⁸³⁸

The involvement of the extended family as the superintendent of the funeral is non-negotiable. The family appoints its representatives with whom the children must work for the duration of whole ceremony to be directed in an acceptable order. The appointment is always representational to take care of a wider interest covering both the paternal and the maternal sides of the deceased. The burial process is such a communal affair in Idjerhe-Urhobo.

When all the hurdles are crossed and the death is satisfactorily and ceremonially confirmed by the family, the family will appoint the *ḡnoḡoḡo* or *onega* ('the chairman of the burial ceremony'). Somebody from the mother side and another from the father side will sit and work together with the *ḡnoḡoḡo*. When a drink is given, it will be received by the man from the mother's side who will in turn give it to the man on the father's side to hold till daybreak. Remember that the burial is done in the night. The family will appoint people to go and bathe the corpse. In those days, little children do not go near where a corpse is bathed. The chief's corpse is usually bathed at

⁸³⁸ Ibid.

the house backyard, then brought into the house and dressed in chief's full regalia and laid on the bed in the centre of the house/parlour. The children will present *udi ugwhoro* ('permission drink') to the family. The family will accept and sing *ine orivwi ighwre* ('seven funeral songs'). The drum to accompany the song is also uniquely made with bamboo sticks. By this, the family has given her permission for the burial and the people can start to drink.⁸³⁹

It is important to note that a chief's corpse has been bathed by the co-chiefs and laid in state before the family ceremony. Then, the family does not physically re-bathe; rather, it only ritually and symbolically performs this part. As a family and communal activity, women are not left out in burials though they may be restricted from certain aspects. The respondent explained the role of women in the burial of *olorogun*. This role of women is however applicable to all burials.

All these while, no woman will be allowed to go inside until the family has gone through the above permission process. When that is done, the *emetẹ uwewwi* ('the family women') can now go inside to sit round the corpse. At the appropriate time they will be dancing round the corpse and singing *ine orivwi* ('the funeral songs') till daybreak. Those songs are not sung at any other time or in any other occasion except in funerals.⁸⁴⁰

Despite the oversight function of the family, the children are mostly responsible for the financial involvement. There are however financial contributions from different arms of the extended family. Such contributions are only to support the children. In the Idjerthe-Urhobo traditional viewpoint, it is the children who are actually burying their father or mother. Hence most requests will be directed to the children through the eldest son. For example, the family will demand for *evwe ehun*, *abiba*, *okpo oyibo* and *evwere* from the senior son and all the children and grand children will contribute towards *igho r'ehọ* ('bathing money'). The number of rounds of gun shots whether seven or twenty-one depends on the financial strength of the children. Then they will bring the corpse out, sing and dance round the corpse. As the singing and dancing are going on, the senior

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

daughter will be fanning the corpse with *adjudju* ('native fan'), the children and the family members will be spraying the people singing and dancing with money. That of course spurs the people to dance more.⁸⁴¹

In Urhobo, *akpo*, this physical world is viewed as a market place or a farm while death is understood as returning home. These metaphoric concepts are illustrated with funeral song such as *akpo re ma rhe re na, eki ma re cho, orọ cho nu ko kpo, ko kpo* ('this world we have come to, we have come to trade, anyone who finishes goes home, goes home').⁸⁴² Another song is *to ba re/2x ibaba ruiruo r'oye to ba re/2x* ('the end has come, the father has finished his work, the end has come').⁸⁴³

Since in Idjerhe-Urhobo like all other Urhobo sub-cultures, *erivwin* is perceived as patterned along the earthly family settlements, the people bury their dead in their family quarters. That is why only strangers or criminals are buried in the public cemetery. A respondent from Olomu said 'cemetery is for strangers; those who have no homes. Nobody is happy to be buried in cemetery because there is no protection there and the bodies can be exhumed at any time.'⁸⁴⁴

Otorho-Idjerhe, the Idjerhe ritual headquarters is significant as a place of burial especially for a chief who must not under any circumstance be buried in the village. It is explained thus,

When day breaks, the chief's corpse is carried to his own quarters in *Idjerhe* main town, because a chief must not be buried in the village. There are eight quarters in *Idjerhe*, every citizen belongs to one quarters or another. The eight quarters in turn belong to the two main sub divisions, four each to

⁸⁴¹ Ibid.

⁸⁴² Diakparomre, 'Symbolism in Urhobo Masks and Mask Performances,' 474.

⁸⁴³ The songs feature prominently in Urhobo burials either in the church or the traditional setting.

⁸⁴⁴ Respondent 13.

Uduaka and *Udurhie*. As they go from the village to the city, they will stop and perform chief's salutary dance at every chief's house they come across on their way, whether the chief is alive or late. There, the senior son with *aberę* ('native steel fan') and the senior daughter with *ujọ* on her shoulder ('cow tail') will *miobọ* ('salute') the chief. A circle will be drawn with native chalk and acrobatic native dance performed in which the senior son demonstrates with *aberę* touching the centre of the circle with the tip of *aberę* three times. During the salute, somebody from the family will come out to accept the salute. They continue until they reach the town and the house where the corpse will be buried.⁸⁴⁵

This burial process is complex, comprising different activities which must be set in order, assigning responsibilities, communicating with religious ritual symbols, avoiding the taboos, involving the required members of the family and the community, and the sharing of the burial meals appropriately to the different arms of the extended family and the community. The people however find the process natural and are never confused with it.

Before then (before the corpse is carried to the place of interment), some people would have been sent ahead to prepare *ushi* ('the grave'). The diggers will put the stalk of a plantain leaf across the dug grave as a seal, which will be opened at payment of an amount to them. Then they will lay the corpse to rest and pray. The senior son will provide drinks for the elders and the diggers who will in turn pray for him and his siblings. The pall bearers will lower the corpse into the grave with their hands and not with ropes as it is done today. Then the grave diggers and all who enter the grave to lower the corpse will wash their hands feet and faces with water, for they must not carry the grave sand home. It is regarded as evil. The head of *ęvwe ehun* would have been cooked in the night and eaten by *onojọsọ* and few elders. The body of *ęvwe ehun* will be shared in the morning after the interment according to the set formula. Then the duty of the senior son is completed.⁸⁴⁶

The complexity of the burial is further reflected in the ceremonial repetition of what the senior son has done by other arms of the family and the community like the *iniọvo* ('those born by the same mother with the deceased'), the *emęsę* ('those from the same

⁸⁴⁵ Respondents 1.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid.

father with the deceased'), the *oguediṣ* in case of *olorogun*, and the *ego* (plural of *oḡo*, 'in-laws'). Despite the repetition, the people are not bored. They are motivated by the belief that the deceased is watching and will thus be gratified if things are properly done.

The following day the *iniṣvo* will perform their ceremony to be accompanied by *okoriniṣvo* ('friends of the children from the same mother'). They will follow the order of the ceremony as usual, presenting the permission drink, supporting it with money and other formalities. The next day, the chiefs will come back, the family will welcome them. The senior son and the senior daughter will be well dressed. Then the chiefs will ask the children whether they are ready to continue with the ceremonial process. If the children say no, the ceremony will be postponed but if yes, it will continue as the *emeṣe* will perform their day next in the same order as the *iniṣvo*.⁸⁴⁷

The in-laws greetings and the sharing of the assets of the deceased are essentially similar for *olorogun* or a non-chief. What may determine the difference may be personalities of the in-laws or the wealth of the deceased.

8.3.4 The concluding ceremonies

The activities to round up a chief's burial in Idjerhe, particularly the *ema* ('the chiefly traditional dance') are public. The respondent who is also an *olorogun* explained,

It is a traditional dance by selected chiefs with one each from *uduaka* and *udurhie* who will perform with *abere*. A chief from the quarters of the late chief will perform last while another chief from the other quarters performs first. The winner will be known but may not be declared. As the performances are going on, all the chiefs, except the two senior chiefs, one each from the two sides of *uduaka* and *udurhie* join the dance and give their last respect to the late chief. The two senior chiefs will sit with the senior son and the senior daughter. As the dances are going on, the family and the crowd will spray money on the dancers. After the chiefs' dance, the chiefs will demand for their *irhuṣ* ('bull or native cow') from the children and plan the day it will be slaughtered, usually on the day the senior *oḡo* ('in-law') will come.⁸⁴⁸

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

He narrated further on the final ceremonies like the slaughtering and sharing of the *irhuen*, the blessing of the children of the deceased by the eldest man in the community and by the council of chiefs.

Before the *ogō* will come, the chiefs will send two delegates from among them to give order to kill the *irhuen* early in the morning. At a time in the process of the burial the *irhuen* should have been bought. It would be kept outside for all to see. It must not die or be lost and any other person must not slaughter the *irhuen* except the one delegated by the chiefs. When the *irhuen* is slaughtered, its head is placed in front of *aghwara*, but the remaining part is divided among the chiefs. A special portion such as *ako* ('better half of one leg') is given to the *ōka-orho* ('the most elderly person in the community'), whether a chief or not as a benefit of long life. The *ōka-orho* will bless the children. The *oguedion* ('the council of chiefs') will give certain money to the children, bless them, and appreciate them for giving their departed parent a befitting burial. The following day, all the chiefs who can attend will gather and receive their portions of *irhuen*. The rest portion is given to the family and the children. Then the burial is completed.⁸⁴⁹

8.4 The Burial of a Non-Chief or an Untitled Person

8.4.1 The report of the demise

Unlike the case of *olorogun*, the process of reporting here is simple and direct to the extended family but the traditional ingredients like money and drinks that accompany the process are similar. It is narrated that when a person dies,

The first son and the rest children (siblings) will report to the extended family that their father or mother is late. The children bring a bottle of native drink and two shillings (equivalent of two hundred naira (₦200) as at today) as they come to report. In those days when there were no mortuaries, the family will send emissaries immediately to confirm the report. When the death is confirmed, the family will ask the children when they will be ready for the burial. If the children are not ready because they are not financially capable, only the interment will be done and the ceremonial burial postponed. But if the children are fully ready, all the rites of the interment and the ceremonial burial will be carried out according to tradition and as jointly planned by the extended family and the children.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

8.4.2 The planning for the burial

In this account of planning the burial of an untitled Idjerhe person, an Idjerhe respondent highlighted the financial and supportive role of the extended family. He explained that when the date of the burial has been agreed upon, the estimated amount needed for the burial is apportioned among the *emo* ('the children'), the *iniowo* ('those born of the same mother with the deceased') and the *emesẹ* ('those born of the same father but different mother with the deceased') in the ratio of 70:20:10 percent respectively. In the absence of the *iniowo*, the *emesẹ* takes the 30 percent. Each group or individuals pay their portion to the extended family representative. The money is used to purchase the following items: the casket, three goats which consist of *evwe ehun* (for anyone who is a parent), *evwe aghwara*, and *evwe siobo-uwevwi*, and the drinks, and foods for entertainment of the public. The *emo*, and the *iniowo* and the *emesẹ* entertain their visitors separately.⁸⁵¹ Another respondent from Agbon explained that the *otorekpo* ('bottom bag') meaning whatever money is left over in the family's collection after all the burial expenses have been paid, is carefully shared among family members.⁸⁵²

The family and the village people also assisted the bereaved to convey the corpse to the city where the burial is to be done. The two respondents from Idjerhe narrated,

In the olden days, when the people died in the village, their corpses were brought to town for interment because every villager has a root in the town from where he/she hailed. As the corpse is being carried from the village to town either by vehicle or by people trekking, the first son is always in the front holding cutlass to clear the road spiritually and driving away evil forces.⁸⁵³

There is a similar practice among the Itsekiri, one of the neighbouring ethnic groups, but in Itsekiri's case, the man who holds the cutlass keeps saying *etsogun* ('It is not war',

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

⁸⁵² Respondent 12.

⁸⁵³ Respondent 1 and 5.

that is to say, if it has been war that took the deceased away they would have given it a good fight). The rite of clearing the way and driving away evil forces presents a mixture of ritual mock battle (which could be in defence of the dead and/or the living) and entertainment. These dimensions are observable in the narration of an Olomu respondent, but who had an experience in Idjerhe. He said:

We went for a burial in *Idjerhe*. The burial was not related to our church, but the senior son was a Christian. He was asked to perform that rite of waving a cutlass before the interment. He refused but another relation did it for him. It is believed that by this act of waving the cutlass up and down, and side to side, one is cutting down all the evil spirits that may want to torment the senior son and other relations. It is a special ceremony.⁸⁵⁴

He continued:

In the real Urhobo traditional burial, carrying the corpse from the village to the town or the place of burial, the people are war-like and very aggressive. There is always shooting of guns and massive destruction of plantains or other things along their way. They cut leaves and all sort of things as they dance along. They use cutlass at will on themselves and others, relying on protective charms that they could not be injured. They cut also the plantains and other useful plants all around the vicinity when they are coming. [...] Some of them decorate their faces in very terrible way. There is a spiritual dimension to the ceremony. It is also an entertainment but terrifying. [...] May be to demonstrate that they valued the departed so much and show their annoyance at his/her departure. The demonstration continues until the body is laid to rest in the grave.⁸⁵⁵

8.4.3 The burial day

According to Idjerhe practice,

When the children have agreed to bury their dead, they will prepare *atiekpe nunu* ('opening the seal'). It is a small native food, served in a small native dish and placed at the outside corner of the house. It is regarded as the food for the dead before the living will be entertained. It is said that *erivwi ri emu nu re, ihwo akpo sa ri emu re* ('the dead has eaten, the living can now feast.')

⁸⁵⁴ Respondent 14.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁶ Respondent 1.

There are two important factors about *atiekpe nunu*. It is to give priority to the departed and it is often served between the interment and the ceremonial burial. In the Egyptian funeral rites, the ceremony of opening the mouth unlocks the jaw of the deceased in order to ‘participate in the eating of meat and drink offerings with friends and relatives’ and ‘to recite the words that would help to secure eternal life.’⁸⁵⁷ John S. Mbiti explained that the offering of libation and food to the spirits of the dead are symbols of communion and remembrance.⁸⁵⁸ Mbiti’s reference is certainly applicable to *atiekpe nunu* and all drinks and food materials offered on behalf of the dead whether those offered for the dead alone or in which the living also partake.

On the day of burial in Idjerhe, there is ceremonial reporting with *udi uyere* thrice—that the father or mother is sick, that the sickness is serious and that he or she could not make it and is dead, in a similar way as narrated for a chief in section 8.3.3 above.⁸⁵⁹ It is obvious that these activities show the importance of gradual rather than sharp breaking of sad news, carrying all the arms of the extended families along and involving them in the affairs of the lives of their persons. The practice underscores what Adjara and Omokri identified as ‘communalism’ in Urhobo family system.⁸⁶⁰ As one community, the people share together in joy or in pain. It also shows that ideally, in the real life, the family is not expected to just hear of the death of their person without being told all along about the illness or whatever other circumstance that might have led to the death. The exception in this case will of course be a case of sudden death by accident.

⁸⁵⁷ Godboldte, ‘Ancient African Traditional Funeral Ceremonies, 70; Charles Henry Stanley Davis, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: the Most Ancient and the Most Important of the Extant Religious Texts of Ancient Egypt* (New York: G. P. Putman’s Sons, 1894), 59.

⁸⁵⁸ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 26.

⁸⁵⁹ Respondent 1.

⁸⁶⁰ Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 25.

By the time of ceremonial reporting on the burial day, the corpse would have been bathed, dressed in his/her best attire, and lying in state in one of the rooms. The door and the windows of the room will be wide opened, while the *emetuvwein* or *eghweya* ('the family daughters' or 'the family women') dance round the corpse and sing *une-orivwi* ('funeral songs'). Nevertheless, after the death has been confirmed ceremonially as mentioned above, the family sends two people to go and carry out ceremonial bathing and dressing of the corpse after which the first son makes available to the family the items such as *abiba*, *okpo oyibo* and *evwẹrẹ*.⁸⁶¹

During the burial, after the *abiba* and *okpo oyibo* strips have been given to an elderly man to keep, the senior son is dressed with the father's clothes by men or the senior daughter with the mother's clothes by women. It is believed that the dead parent will not be happy if the children fail to wear their dress at their burial and even after. Having dressed the first son or the first daughter, he/she is brought to sit with the family in the tent which is always made of sticks and palm fronds and built directly in front of the room where the corpse is lying in state. Even nowadays if the children are wealthy and could afford many tarpaulin tents for their guests, it is still required that the family tent be made of sticks and palm fronds⁸⁶² to demonstrate the centrality of their culture.

In Idjerhe burial affairs, the positions of the first son, first daughter and last child among the children, are very important. When the first child is seated, the family demands for *udi ugwhoro* ('wine for permission/entertainment') from him/her. Acceptance of the wine by the family means the granting of permission to whosoever is to play their band.

⁸⁶¹ Respondents 1 and 5.

⁸⁶² Ibid.

The family opens the ceremony by singing *une-orivwi ighwre* ('seven funeral songs')⁸⁶³ and others follow. The *udi ugwhoro* is shared among the family members in their tent and part of it taken to *eghweya* who are dancing and singing round the corpse where it is lying in state. The first son/daughter must appreciate the *eghweya* from time to time during the burial rites.⁸⁶⁴

As Urhobo burial is done in the night, before the day breaks, the deceased's family will welcome and entertain their in-laws, sometimes combined, and sometimes individually by presenting cola nuts and drinks with money as 'wedge.' Individual members will further support the family's presentation with any amount each of them can afford, and the appointed family speaker for the occasion usually announces the amount to the gathering. It is expected of each in-law to perform *oganoso* ('respond') in a bigger way in order to demonstrate his wealth and preparedness for the burial. Only *ego* who have paid their wives' bride price are qualified for this rite because in Urhobo setting, there are also recognised *ose* ('concubines')⁸⁶⁵ who are already with children. The *ose* are not eligible for this aspect of the burial.⁸⁶⁶

The *ego* are responsible for digging the grave. They may do it themselves or pay for the service. Early in the morning, as the grave is being dug, about seven rounds (depending on the financial strength of the children) of *ikurusu* ('gun') are shot to drive away evil forces associated with the spirit of death. When the grave is completed, the diggers will

⁸⁶³ Two examples of the songs are (1), *Ero me nophio re, Ero me no phiophio rokoru* ('my eyes are fixed o! My eyes are fixed o! My friend'), implying death renders me lonely and helpless. (2), *Baba yerobuvwein, yo, Edefa rakpo a cha je mro ma* ('Baba, greet home, next world, we will meet again')

⁸⁶⁴ Respondents 1 and 5.

⁸⁶⁵ If for any reason an Urhobo man is not ready to pay a woman's bride price, he could be allowed to co-habit and raise children with the woman if he pays a certain amount of money regarded as *me rovwere* ('I give my consent') to the woman's father. The acceptance of the money by the father signifies his consent. Then the woman is addressed as *ose* ('concubine'), not *aye* ('wife').

⁸⁶⁶ Respondents 1 and 5.

place two stalks of plantain leaves across the grave as a seal, which can only be broken with a gift of a bottle of *ogogoro* ('native gin or ethanol') from the first son as an appreciation of the work done. They will then go and report to the family that the grave is ready.⁸⁶⁷

At this point, the family will call on all the children to pay *unuẹbo* ('counting the number'). Each child pays a token, but it is a way to know the number of children that the deceased had. Thereafter, the corpse in the casket is placed on a table outside. The *eghweya* continue in their role of singing and dancing around the casket but their songs changed to be those of farewell. The deceased's children also continue to appreciate the *eghweya* by throwing money on the top of the casket for them and fanning both the casket and the *eghweya* with *adjudju* ('the native hand fan').⁸⁶⁸ The extended family will then permit the children to go ahead with the interment. The children will have smooth proceedings if they respect the elders and cooperate with the family.

When the corpse is lowered into the grave, the first son takes sand with the left hand, turns it around his own head and throws it upon the casket. This action expresses a desire that the deceased should carry away all evils from the family. All other children follow suit in their order of seniority, then the close relations. Thereafter, the grave is covered with sand, while the first son walks across the grave with bare feet, stamping on the sand to make it firm. He holds a stick with his left hand and uses the stick to break once the *ẹvwẹrẹ* on top of the grave. On the one hand, this walking on the grave barefooted could demonstrate link and ties with the departed as Mbiti observed among

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid.

other Africans.⁸⁶⁹ On the other hand, the breaking of *evwẹrẹ* symbolises separation. As the people return from the interment, the *evwe ehun* which must have been cooked is shared and eaten. The *ihwo ri tu ushi* ('those who dug the grave') must fetch water to wash their legs, hands and faces ceremonially even after the normal cleaning of their body. It is a symbol of washing away evil.⁸⁷⁰

After the interment, the people relax till the evening when the *iniṣo* will perform their ceremony followed by the *emẹsẹ* in the following evening. Other relevant groups will follow in turn in a similar order. That is why burials can take three or four days, depending on the personality of the deceased. If the man has in-laws, the in-laws greetings will follow the party of the *emẹsẹ*.⁸⁷¹

8.4.4 The in-laws' greetings

The in-laws greeting is an important aspect of Urhobo traditional burial. It is usually fixed on the day of *aghwara*. The *ubrevwiẹ* ('the last child') and the grand children will play their band to await the in-laws who will come in the night. Before the arrival of the in-laws, the family will serve the 'mock-coffin' (the ark of the dead to symbolise the presence of the spirit of the deceased) placed inside *aghwara* ('a little but well decorated hut made to house the spirit of the dead'). The *onega* will serve *aghwara* with a piece of ritual food after which the senior son and the senior daughter will sing and dance to the rhythm of the song *Uje! Uje!! Uje!!!* ('Twenty! Twenty!! Twenty!!!'), and simultaneously distribute the cowries which they have kept in a bag they carry.⁸⁷² The people at the ceremony then rush to pick the cowries, which they cherish and keep as

⁸⁶⁹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 26.

⁸⁷⁰ Respondents 1 and 5.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

⁸⁷² Ibid.

treasures from the ancestors. *Uje* is a big number in Urhobo counting and cowries were originally used as money in Urhobo Land. Therefore the wish to have cowries in twenties symbolises the prayer for abundant wealth.⁸⁷³

When the in-laws are approaching the venue of the burial, the family sends a delegate to meet them on the way. One woman from among the in-laws entourage carries a gas lamp on her head for the people to see the way. A failure to lead the in-laws by this gas lamp attracts a huge fine from the family of the deceased. When the in-laws and those who went to welcome them have reached the compound, they will dance forward and backward seven times before they are allowed to sit for the ceremony. The gas lamp is then placed in front of *aghwara*.

The *aghwara* is usually decorated with expensive clothes like *efeludu* and *uriofò* ('damask and ladies head ties'). A goat is sacrificed to the *aghwara* ('the hut') and the 'mock-coffin' ('the ark of the dead') inside. This goat is the second for a non-chief but the eleventh for a chief. The head of the goat is kept in the 'mock-coffin' and the blood is sprinkled on the seven yam tubers⁸⁷⁴ that are placed in front of the mock coffin. This 'mock-coffin' is usually wrapped with *okpo oyibo*. The body of the *evwe aghwara* is thrown away, but the young people around always rush to pick it up and share it among themselves. The seven yams are still robbed with *owha* ('cam lotion from cam wood.'

⁸⁷³ Ebireri C. Ojo, 'Symbols as means of Communicating Religious Concepts in Urhobo Traditional Society,' in *Studies in Arts, Religion & Culture among the Urhobo & Isoko People*, eds. G. G. Dara, E. S. Akama and J. T. Agberia, 77–84 (Port Harcourt: Pam Unique Publishers, 2003), 81.

⁸⁷⁴ A chief from Orogun-Urhobo explains that as much as goats like yams, they forbid yams from *aghwara* and it looks surprising.

osùn in Yorùbá). The first son and the first daughter will each sit on a well dressed chair; one on the right and the other on the left of the *aghwara*.

When everyone is well seated, the family officially and customarily welcomes the in-laws with drinks, cola nuts and money; to which the in-laws will perform *oganosọ* with drinks, monetary wedge and more monetary support by members of the entourage. The family receives the *oganosọ* and prays for the in-laws. It is expected of the in-laws that they bring a jar containing twelve bottles of *ogogoro* ('native gin'). An appointee of the family cross checks the presentations to make sure that the amount of drink is correct. A little money is usually added to this drink. After the in-laws have presented their *udi uhworo* ('permission drink'), they sing *ine orivwi ighwre* ('seven funeral farewell songs') with the family before they could move to the place prepared for them where they will play their band till day breaks.

The following morning, after the in-laws have returned home, the children and the family will dance to the road and throw away the seven tubers of yams that have been kept inside the *aghwara*. Then the *aghwara* will be dismantled and the 'mock-coffin' buried with the head of *ẹvwe aghwara*.⁸⁷⁵ It is however strange that goat refuses to eat *aghwara* yams and this phenomenon was confirmed by four respondents.⁸⁷⁶ One of the respondents thought that goats could therefore be probably spiritual to have recognised ritual yams. He expressed further that the spiritual nature of goats may be what makes the Urhobo to prefer goats and not other animals for all their rituals and religious ceremonies.⁸⁷⁷

⁸⁷⁵ Respondents 1 and 5.

⁸⁷⁶ See respondents 4, 11, 12 and 20.

⁸⁷⁷ Respondent 4.

8.4.5 The concluding ceremony

After the in-laws greetings, the *emu-siobọ-uwevwi* ('the closing ceremony food') is prepared. The third goat, *evwe siobọ-uwevwi* ('goat for the closing ceremony') is used to prepare this food. Only the skull is kept in a plate on top of a small table inside the house. It always represents the presence of the dead person in the house. It is called *ihurhe* ('ancestor'). The remaining cowries that were not shared are woven together round a stick called *ophọ* and placed together with this goat's skull to represent the deceased. That is what is served as an ancestor whenever the need arises.

The wife, children, *iniọvo* and the *emesẹ* bring portions of their food to the main parlour. It is usually the native food which consists of *usi* ('prepared starch'), yam, unripe plantain, *oghwo* ('oil soup'), *banga* ('oil palm') soup with fish and meat. The family representatives take a little portion from each other's food and gather it in a tray. It is this collected food that is shared among the family members and the guests who are seated with them. After the eating, the senior son brings a final drink to the family and is blessed by the family. Thereafter the ritual of shaving the head by the family⁸⁷⁸ is performed. The details of head shaving are discussed in chapter nine, section 9.2.

8.4.6 The execution of the will

The will is shared three months after the burial. During the sharing, the *abiba* and *okpo oyibo* strips are brought to represent the spirit of the dead. They also serve as the symbols or marks that the burial was well done and that every arm of the family was well represented. The materials are later kept in the family as memorials. The will of the deceased is executed among the children and family members (nuclear and extended).

⁸⁷⁸ Respondents 1 and 5.

The first son, the first daughter, and the last child are given preference over the other children. The *iniovo*, *emeşe* and the family representatives who oversee the execution of the will also have their share.

The last cloth worn by the deceased is given to the senior son/daughter. The main parlour is for the first son to hold in common for the family. It means that if that first son dies, that main parlour does not belong to his own son but to the next brother in the order of seniority. All the beneficiaries, excluding the family representatives, will bring money and *udi akpevw* ('appreciation drink') to the family representatives, who will in turn bless them. The drinks are shared by all present but the money is for the family representatives only. If the properties are not shared, *eghwoghwo* ('termites') will eat them. The destruction by *eghwoghwo* is regarded as a sign of annoyance of the deceased spirit. Wives are included in the properties to be shared.⁸⁷⁹

8.5 The Burial of a Man or a Woman

There is a view expressed from Agbarha-Otör-Urhobo that the place a man is buried is different from that of a woman. It stated that the men are buried inside the house while the women are buried at the veranda, or within the living quarters.⁸⁸⁰ The practice in Olomu presents another pattern; women are buried outside by *irosio* ('where rain drops') except the women who were chiefs who could be buried inside a house. Hence Olomu women are encouraged to accept chieftaincy titles or at least initiate the process that they may be buried inside the house at death. Olomu men too are not automatically qualified for burial under a roof. It is for those who have houses. Men who have no houses are buried outside until their children will build house over them. To be buried inside a

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁰ Respondent 23.

house is a thing of pride.⁸⁸¹ This kind of discrimination is common with other Urhobo but in different forms. For instance, Peter Ekeh from Agbon-Urhobo stated that ‘anyone who had at least a child in his or her lifetime—even if the child died—was entitled to be buried under a roof. Childless persons and children were buried near the house, but not inside the house.’⁸⁸² Thus while Agbarha- Otor distinguishes between man and woman, Olomu between a titled and non-titled woman or a man with or without a house, Agbon does discriminate between the person who has a child or children and the one who has none.

There is however a unique experience about women’s burial that is common to all Urhobo. The married women are at death buried in their father’s, not in the husband’s compound, as with the Yorùbá. If a woman’s corpse is not carried back to the father’s compound, it is regarded that such woman has been treated as *oviẹ* (‘a slave’). A respondent from Agbarho-Urhobo clarified, ‘the husband has no say when his wife dies. The woman’s family on the father’s side dictates the terms.’⁸⁸³ When asked if burying a wife in her husband’s family land is a taboo and capable of evoking a curse upon the husband’s family, he simply explained, ‘it is not allowed in Agbarho since the woman was not sold as a slave. It is only the slave that you can bury anywhere.’⁸⁸⁴

Joseph O. Asagba threw light on how Urhobo slaves were buried especially during the era of slavery. He explained that the slaves with good conduct may be buried at the back of the house of their owners but were buried ‘face down because they were considered inferior.’⁸⁸⁵ This thought certainly makes the Urhobo people detest any action that may

⁸⁸¹ Respondent 13.

⁸⁸² Ekeh, ‘A Profile of Urhobo Culture,’ 47.

⁸⁸³ Respondent 21.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁵ Asagba, *The Untold Story of a Nigerian Royal Family*, 128.

amount to them being treated as slaves at death. Hence the just quoted Agbarho respondent further emphasised that a woman like man must return to the father's place at death because she was a free citizen and not a slave.⁸⁸⁶ It is important to note the equal right that the female children have with the males concerning a place for burial in their father's family land. A respondent clarified that 'if the children are well-to-do and are able to build a house somewhere else; and want their mother buried in such a house; they must take special permission and settlement with their mother's father's family.' He gave an instance of a court case that resulted from disagreement over the burial place of a woman which made her corpse to remain unburied for two years.⁸⁸⁷ Another respondent mentioned a similar case which has lasted for over three years.⁸⁸⁸

One of the benefits of the practice of returning women to their father's family for burial in Urhobo Land is that it encourages women for their husbands or children to build houses in the father-in-law's compound before or at the death of a woman. A female respondent confirmed this point, she said:

When my father died, he had only one house. We did not share the house but left it for the general use of the family. If anybody wants to do any ceremony like wedding, they come to the house. If anyone who has not built a house died, he/she was buried in one of the rooms. As for me, I have built one small house in my father's place. When I die, I will be buried in my house. Presently, people have been buried in all the rooms in my father's house. So, I challenged all other children to come and build houses at home. They are responding and building houses now.⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁶ Respondent 21.

⁸⁸⁷ Respondent 12.

⁸⁸⁸ Respondent 23.

⁸⁸⁹ Respondent 11.

8.6 The Burial of a ‘Good’ Person and a ‘Bad’ Person

The people that the Urhobo regard as bad include *orieda* (‘a witch’),⁸⁹⁰ whether *orieda-aye* (‘female witch’) or *orieda-eshare* (‘male witch’), *oji* (‘a thief’), *ozighe* (‘muderer’) and others who have committed a lot of crimes.⁸⁹¹ An Idjerhe respondent said that in those days, the Urhobo sell out any known witch to other ethnic groups as slave in order to ostracise the person and keep him/her far away from the family.⁸⁹²

8.7 Mature or Premature Death

The Urhobo do not lay emphasis on the number of years to determine maturity in death. The usual point of reference is whether the deceased got married, had children and lived a good life. If yes, the deceased is accorded a proper burial. But if one dies as a child, an unmarried youth or without biological children, it is regarded as unwelcome and premature death. The person is not given full burial rites in Urhobo Land. The concept of premature or untimely death is not limited to Urhobo Land. Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou recognised broad nature of the belief in ‘normal’ time for things to occur and is taken for granted without question. They cited ‘still births, drowning, and death before marriage as examples of untimely death.’⁸⁹³

⁸⁹⁰ Bradbury, ‘The Benin Kingdom; the Ishan; the Northern Edo; the Urhobo; and Isoko of the Niger Delta,’ *Ethnographic Survey of Africa: West Africa, Part XIII*, 163. The witches refer to both sexes and are regarded as wicked. The witches are believed to have capability to kill by bewitchment. The killing by warriors is not regarded as evil but achievement but the killing by witches and wizards through bewitchment is punished by the ancestors on one hand and by the living people through the denial of witches and wizards the honourable burials on the other hand (See Eriwwo, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria: The Urhobo People*, 58–63).

⁸⁹¹ Respondent 21.

⁸⁹² Respondent 5.

⁸⁹³ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 141.

8.8 Natural versus Strange Deaths and their Burials

Although death occurs regularly, people are never familiar with it as each occasion of death comes with unique shocks. There is always weeping, wailing, hissing, sighing and other expression of sadness and anguish at the news of death. There is exception with the death of a very old person which could be regarded as natural death. Even then some still raise the cry of affection. On the other hand, all Urhobo have the practice of suspecting unnatural cause for premature death. The suspected causes may include witchcraft, curse, evil spirits, or the judgement of the ancestors.⁸⁹⁴ Adogbo stated that among the Urhobo, sudden death could be a matter of *urhievwe/otarhe* ('destiny') or caused by evil machination of the witches and sorcerers or by personal sins⁸⁹⁵ or abomination which a person commits 'against God, the ancestors or the living members of his family.'⁸⁹⁶

If however, the Urhobo feel that the deceased is innocent and a victim of somebody's wickedness, they prepare the corpse to avenge itself from the spirit world. In Idjerhe, they inter such body with dangerous weapons such as a cutlass, axe, and firewood and sometimes with a live dog.⁸⁹⁷ In Agbon, it may also include a live duck.⁸⁹⁸ A respondent added that 'if a wife is suspected to have caused her husband's death, the family may compel her to drink from the solution water that came out of bathing the late husband.'

⁸⁹⁴ John S. Mbiti, Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénoú observed the spread of the belief in the phenomenon of strange death also among the Africans and Asians. The list of the causes of such death to includes sorcery, witchcraft, magic, curse, broken taboos, angry ancestors, spirits or ghosts of those who died unsatisfied like during child birth or barren or unmarried; or during hunting, fishing, or battles and whose bodies were not recovered and given proper burial (See Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 111–112; Hieber, Shaw and Tiénoú, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 141–142).

⁸⁹⁵ Adogbo, 'The Signification of Rituals of Destiny among the Urhobo,' 86–88, 90–91.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁸⁹⁷ Respondent 5; Felicia Ohwovoriole, 'Eschatological Motifs and Socio-Spiritual Aspects of Urhobo Funeral Poetry,' *The Journal of International Social Research*, 3, no. 11 (Spring 2010), 445–454: 448.

⁸⁹⁸ Respondent 12. Dog and duck are sacred animals among the Urhobo.

She said further that ‘it is to prove her innocence. If she is innocent, she will be fine but if not, something terrible will happen to her and she will confess or die.’⁸⁹⁹ The implications of these rituals are to invoke the spirit of the deceased to hunt his/her killers.

The Urhobo people have rituals to supplicate for the deceased a better lot in the next reincarnation as well. Felicia Ohwovoriole from Ugheli-Urhobo gave an example of the placement of a full maize cob in the hand of the deceased inside the coffin before it is covered with sand.⁹⁰⁰ The cob is an Urhobo symbol of prayer that the deceased should choose a fuller life in the next coming. The practice of placing the maize cob in the hand of the deceased is not general to all Urhobo. Other subcultures may have their unique way of expressing the same belief.

Nevertheless, whatever the cause of death, after the initial upset and resentment, the Urhobo settle down to accept the reality. They plan what they consider important, ‘proper burial’ to better the lot of the dead and the living. Every member of the family, near or distant, is expected to cooperate towards the proper burial. Anyone who proves otherwise may be suspected as being the cause of the death and would be ostracised by the family. No responsible person would be comfortable with such treatment from their family.

⁸⁹⁹ Respondent 15.

⁹⁰⁰ Ohwovoriole, ‘Eschatological Motifs and Socio-Spiritual Aspects of Urhobo Funeral Poetry,’ 447.

Another dimension of the concept of unnatural death among the Urhobo relates to deaths that happen in bad circumstances. The *aghwa rode* ('evil forest') features prominently in the burials of people who died of small pox, or fell from a palm tree, or died during pregnancy or child birth. Others are death by suicide, drowning or death by thunder. These are not accorded the dignity of being buried in the residential quarters.⁹⁰¹ Rather, their corpses are taken to *aghwa rode* which is regarded as a dwelling place of the evil spirits that might have been responsible for their condition. For instance, in 2008, a deceased pregnant member of a Baptist church was refused burial by her family within the family compound because they considered that it could bring evil to the family.⁹⁰²

Each situation may still determine its particular way of burial. For instance, the corpse of a person that commits suicide is thrown into the *aghwa rode*. That of a drowned person is buried by the bank of the river where the accident occurs. The one who falls from palm tree and dies is buried in the bush near the scene of the tragedy. Women who die in pregnancy or during the child birth are not buried in the compound but far away in the bush in order to keep evil at bay. If anyone is killed by thunder or is suspected to have been killed by a god, his/her corpse is given to the priests or priestesses of that god to handle. His/her properties are also consigned to the shrine.

Not all these practices are in full operation today among the Urhobo people, but the thoughts are very much alive within them. For instance, a respondent explained these abnormal deaths can bring curse upon a town.⁹⁰³ It is believed that the spirits of the

⁹⁰¹ See Respondent 23.

⁹⁰² The church was in Sapele but the burial took place in Eku-Urhobo as the member hailed from Eku.

⁹⁰³ Respondent 21.

people who died in those unusual circumstances do not go to *erivwi*, but roam as *erierhi r'osuosuo* ('wandering spirit').

8.9 Proper and Improper Burials

Apart from the lifestyle of the deceased and the circumstance of death, the activities of the relations can also contribute to proper or improper burial. The Urhobo regard burial as escorting the deceased 'home.' Therefore, everything known to be done for the smooth spiritual journey of the deceased is pursued vigorously. Since the beneficiary, the deceased cannot make any physical effort, the onus lies on the children and close relations to bear the burden for the departed. The amount of interest they put in is regarded as an indication of the degree of love and respect they had for the departed. Hence the Urhobo have a dual objective in mind during the burial of which may be considered normal. First is to present the good image of the deceased to the guests and secondly to project the image of his or her family.

A burial is called proper burial in Urhobo if all the traditional requirements are met. It is improper if there are shortfalls in the traditional requirements and procedures. The concept of proper burial is significant among the Urhobo to the extent that in case of death in far places in which the corpse could not be brought to Urhobo home land, it is required that a patch of the deceased's hair, toe and finger nails are brought home instead for ritual burial.⁹⁰⁴

⁹⁰⁴ Ekeh, 'A Profile of Urhobo Culture,' 47.

For normal and proper burials, the interment is usually very early in the morning or in the evening but not in the afternoon or at night. Ekeh maintained that ‘custom forbade burial of good people at night.’⁹⁰⁵ For other kinds of abnormal burials, the corpse can be interred or thrown away at any time. Having the grave in the house or within the father’s compound is also cherished by the Urhobo. Even married women as indicated earlier are taken to their father’s compound for burial at death. Any person whose corpse is buried outside the father’s compound is looked upon as *oviẹ* (‘slave’). It is also thought that only a person who is ‘nobody’ or ‘non-entity’ that can be buried in the public cemetery. That is why strangers, paupers, children or public executed thieves are often buried in public cemetery.

8.10 Functions and Symbols of Urhobo Burial

Firstly, burial according to tradition is a cultural obligation among the Urhobo without which a family is ostracised. When asked what happens if Urhobo burial tradition is not performed for his late father, a respondent answered, ‘people in the village will look down on us.’⁹⁰⁶ Secondly, Urhobo burial showcases to the public the history and personality of the deceased as it formerly registers people according to their origin and status in the society. Thirdly, the activities by the children and the involvement of all members of the extended family and the community are demonstrations of their love for the deceased and facilitate unity of Urhobo people from the family to the sub-cultural levels. Fourthly, the requirement to follow certain procedures in reporting and planning the burial instils the motif of respect for family elders. Fifthly, burial promotes the deceased who has lived and died well to an ancestor, seeks fuller life in the next life for the deceased who suffered sudden death and protects the family and community from

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁶ Respondent 19.

evils that accompany strange deaths. In summary, Urhobo burials reinforce their sense of history, identity, solidarity, security and continuity. Hence the Urhobo are determined to accord their deceased members befitting burial rites.

Urhobo burial process is filled with symbolic statements, activities and objects and the meaning of each of the symbols has been explained alongside. Nevertheless few examples could be repeated, as reminder. For instance, the breaking of *evwẹrẹ* by widow means separation, the matching on the grave by eldest son demonstrates responsibility and duty and the retention of *ihurhẹ abiba* and *okpo oyibo* in the family shrine is to continue to live with the deceased as ancestor. As pointed out by Victor Turner, certain symbols are not ‘univocal’ but ‘multivocal,’ ‘susceptible of many meanings,’⁹⁰⁷ the *okpo oyibo* is in that category as a link with the deceased, a means of invoking his or her presence, a symbol of purity of character attributed to him or her and is also expected of the descendants as a prerequisite for harmonious relationship within themselves and with their ancestors. The next chapter continues with the exploration of *uruemu r’orivwin reshio rihwo r’Urhobo* by examining in detail, the roles of different arms of Urhobo family during the funeral activities. In addition, it discusses their concepts of respecting the deceased, protecting the bereaved and rounds up with list of certain recurring themes generated through the field work.

⁹⁰⁷ Turner, *The Drums of Affliction*, 17.

CHAPTER NINE–BURIAL ROLES AND PRACTICES

This chapter brings to an end the treatment of Urhobo burial tradition as discussed in chapters seven, eight and nine. The chapter examines the roles of *omoshare r'okpako* ('eldest son'), *ubrevwię*, *uvwrómọ* ('last born'), *owara* ('eldest man in the family'), *orua* ('extended family'), and *ogọ* (in-law) in the Idjerhe-Urhobo burial rites. It also analyses the Urhobo traditional burial practices that forestall the family union, respect for the deceased and concern of protection for the bereaved. The chapter rounds up with the thematic connections generated through the field work.

9.1 Urhobo Burial Roles

9.1.1 The roles of *omoshare r'okpako* ('first male child') *ubrevwię* ('the last child') and *uvwrómọ* ('the grand children')

The Urhobo prize the role of children in burial and biological children alone are allowed to slaughter the *ęvwe ehun*. Refusal to perform one's parent's burial or to kill the *ęvwe ehun* is regarded by the Urhobo as a dishonour to one's parent. The Urhobo expect a good child to appreciate the life of his/her parents and to keep their memories alive. Similar aspiration exists among the Igbos 'in the form of *ahamefula*: 'that my name may not be obliterated.'⁹⁰⁸ It is an attempt to keep the memory that led to the activities that are regarded as ancestor's worship. During the burial, *omoshare r'okpako* presents all the drinks; *udi uyęę*, *udi ughworo*, *udi akpęvwe* ('drinks for appreciation') for different groups including the drink (gin) of purification to *ihwo ri tu ushi* ('the grave diggers').⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁸ Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa*, 205.

⁹⁰⁹ Ohwovoriola, 'Eschatological Motifs and Socio-Spiritual Aspects of Urhobo Funeral Poetry,' 447. The grave diggers use water also for washing or purification ritual (Respondent 1).

He is actually performing these roles on behalf of all the children but he is the one mostly responsibly to the extended family. All the presentations in the ceremony are in his name first and then on behalf of the other children. He buys the casket for the burial. He along with the senior daughter of the deceased is dressed especially for the *aghwarha* aspect of the ceremony. In the course of procession to the grave site, *omoshare r'okpako* stays in the front physically demonstrating with a cutlass as if clearing a bush path. This action is symbolically significant to demonstrate the spiritual clearance of the father's path to *erivwin*. As *omoshare r'okpako*, Bruce Onobrakpeya relayed his own experience how he was 'dressed in white (shirt, wrapper, hat, fan, and horsetail fly-whisk),' 'brandishing a cutlass' and leading his 'father's burial procession.'⁹¹⁰ At the time of the grave site rituals, he is the first to perform *ekpe udu* ('throwing sand on the the deceased's chest') for others to follow.⁹¹¹ Felicia Ohwovoriøle pointed out another role of *omoshare r'okpako* as a leader of family petition before the ancestors. Before the interment, the eldest son of the deceased 'prays and pleads on behalf of all other children' and makes 'special requests [...] to the deceased' for 'peace and prosperity for all those left behind.'⁹¹²

The *ubrevwię* ('the last child') and *uvwrømø* ('the grand children') also occupy important positions in burial affairs as they are often allowed to perform awaiting the in-laws on the in-laws greeting day which may also be the day for *aghwarha*.⁹¹³ A respondent from Agbon explained that after the grave is covered, 'the first and the last of the children are to march on top of the grave. Even, if the last child is a small child,

⁹¹⁰ Onobrakpeya, 'Color Symbolism in Urhobo Art, 97. Onobrakpeya from Agbarha-Otor-Urhobo uses the term *owanran* instead of *omoshare okpako*. They both have the same meaning

⁹¹¹ Respondent 5.

⁹¹² Ohwovoriøle, 'Eschatological Motifs and Socio-Spiritual Aspects of Urhobo Funeral Poetry,' 447.

⁹¹³ Respondent 1. See chapter seven, section 7.4.4.

somebody will carry him/her and use his/her legs to march on top of the grave.’⁹¹⁴ It is a symbol that the children are able to bury their parent.⁹¹⁵

9.1.2 The role of *orua* (‘extended family’) and *owara* (‘the eldest man of the family’)

The *orua* supports the children of the deceased throughout and after the burial ceremony. They must however be given the due recognition by the children of the deceased because the authority regarding the traditional burial process lies with the *orua*. Therefore, the *omoshare r’okpako* must adequately consult with the *orua* through the *owara*. The assistance from *orua* includes financial contribution, counselling, and ritual guide as they work with *owara* to offer their support. The *orua* also supervise the execution of the deceased’s will. The different arms of *orua* are the *iniowo*, *emese*, and *emetẹ-uwwevwi/eghweya*. Their specific duties have been explained in narrating the burial processes in chapter eight, section 8.4.2. The *owara* embodies the family authority. He in consultation with the other elders of the family gives instructions relating to the burial process. All reports and requests are first directed to him. As the link between the living and the dead he also leads the service to the ancestors. He keeps the *abiba*, and a stripe of *okpo oyibo*⁹¹⁶ used for the burial as symbols of continuous link with the dead and through which his/her spirit can be invoked during family functions.

Commending the Urhobo tradition of family support, a respondent said, when he was growing up,

Distant relations will come when somebody died. They will stay for about one week. The burial was about seven days. The purpose was to comfort the

⁹¹⁴ Respondent 12.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid.

⁹¹⁶ A brief mention is made of *abiba* and *okpo oyibo* in the chapter one, section 1.1.

bereaved family. And that is a very good strong point in the African tradition. Nowadays (2011), the time of mourning is too short.⁹¹⁷

In comparison, he stated that the family was closer and the family tie was stronger in the olden days unlike the present time when first cousins could not recognise one another.⁹¹⁸

But another respondent considered the public involvement as a burden, by stating that ‘because a lot of people are hungry, they use the burial opportunity to eat free food and take plenty free drinks. Some of them just stop going to their farms for the number of days that the ceremony will last.’⁹¹⁹

Another reason the involvement of the extended family may become expensive and a burden for the children could be related to the way the *emetę-uvwevwi* (‘the family women’) have gradually turned their social support to a means of collecting money as much as possible from the children of the deceased. It becomes an issue when the women begin to deride whoever is unable to meet their demand. Some children however give the money with happiness as a way of true appreciation to these women whereas others view their request as an unnecessary burden. To explain the activities of this group, a female respondent from Abraka who might have been part of this group at some times and therefore regarded as a reliable internal witness narrated the account of her own father’s burial thus,

On the seventh/last day, the women did a mock play, demonstrated as if they were frying okro. They then called on all the children and grand children from the eldest to the youngest to contribute money towards their work. If anyone is tight fisted and refused to give them money, they were annoyed with such a person.⁹²⁰

⁹¹⁷ Respondent 3.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

⁹¹⁹ Respondent 4.

⁹²⁰ Respondent 15.

The implication is that they will develop a negative opinion about that person that he or she is not generous. In an attempt to avoid such feeling and judgement, the children of the deceased make effort to satisfy the *emetẹ-uvwevwi*. Another respondent from Agbon gave similar points in her narration thus,

When the people are set for burial, they sing seven different funeral songs called songs of announcement. After the songs, they settle down and demand for money and drinks from the children. They say *obẹvwẹ* ('we are tired') and should be reimbursed with money and drinks.⁹²¹

In Olomu-Urhobo, the children of the deceased face similar challenges as the community expected them to give certain amount of items of food, drinks and money to the different groups like the *ọrahwa* ('youths'), the elders and women. The community also makes Christians who do not want to kill burial goats to pay money instead.⁹²²

9.1.3 The role of *ogọ* ('in-law')

Like the senior son of the deceased, the most senior *ogọ* also has a prominent role to play in the burial of the parent-in-law. He is to lead all the other *egọ* to take charge of digging the grave or to pay the youths for it. The *egọ* also perform the in-laws greetings to conclude the burial. They take turn in their order of marriage seniority to perform the greeting on the same day or on different days, as jointly agreed with the deceased's family. Felicia Ohwovoriọle mentions the in-laws' duty of *oghwa ẹghoriẹ* ('rolling of spiritual load') in which the in-laws symbolically assist the departed to roll the load he/she is carrying to *erivwin*.⁹²³

⁹²¹ Respondent 12.

⁹²² Respondent 13.

⁹²³ Ohwovoriọle, 'Eschatological Motifs and Socio-Spiritual Aspects of Urhobo Funeral Poetry,' 447.

Consoling his wife for the bereavement of the parent is the significant aspect of the in-law's day. Therefore, the *ogog* comes with substantial monetary gift for his wife and is equally supported with sums of money by the people who accompanied him. As indicated before, a person appointed for the purpose announces the amount given by each donor. The greater part of this money is given to the wife and is symbolically a means to 'wipe off her tears.' The remaining money is for the *orua*.⁹²⁴ It is an important aspect of burial ceremony to the extent that the deceased's family can seize a wife from any *ogog* who fails to perform the rite.⁹²⁵

9.2 The Concept of Respect and Honour for the Deceased

1. Shaving of Head: Towards the end of the burial, all the family members who are younger than the deceased shave their heads to honour and mourn the deceased. Respect, honour and mourning go together because people mourn the death of the person they love and respect. The family members who suppose to shave their head but refused are fined in monetary terms. It is regarded that they do not show concern to the spiritual wellbeing of the deceased. All the shaved hair is packed into *aderha* ('a cross road' or 'a road junction') outside the village. The *aderha* is regarded as a meeting point of *akpo* and *erivwin*; the physical and the spiritual beings, the living and the dead. Therefore placing the shaved hair at the *aderha* is to bring it to the awareness of the deceased that his family respected and mourned him or her.

Five respondents explained the practice of head shaving as a symbol of mourning, honour and respect for the dead among the Urhobo.⁹²⁶ They also shared their personal

⁹²⁴ Respondent 11.

⁹²⁵ Respondent 14.

⁹²⁶ Respondents 4, 10, 13, 15 and 20.

experiences of different way they respected their deceased. One of them expressed it in term of maximum respect as he explained,

I shaved during my father's burial and was told never to shave for any other person in life. It means the only person I can shave for is my father. It shows the big respect I have for him. It is the highest level of respect.⁹²⁷

Among the Uvwię-Urhobo, all the children of the deceased shave their heads but the first son is exempted because his head is respected as the one who has taken over the position of the deceased parent.⁹²⁸ Although those who may not want to shave could buy their exemption, Zoma commented that 'children took pride in shaving their hair (head) for their dead parents,' saying 'their love for their parents was much more than a bunch of hair which would grow back anyway.'⁹²⁹ In other places not specified in Africa, shaving of heads during funerals symbolises separation and the 'belief that death does not destroy life' since the hair will grow again.⁹³⁰

2. Burial in the Ancestral Home Land and under a roof: A respondent explained the concept of respect and dignity in terms of returning the deceased to the ancestral home land for burial. His explanation is adequately representative of the views of other respondents and the thought of the Urhobo people. He narrated,

Urhobo people do not want to bury their person outside family home. No matter how far the place of sojourning may be, they want to carry the person home at death. This is to say the person returned home. In those days, when there was no medical embalm, they use fire smoke to smoke the dead and preserve the body until they are able to carry it home. It is regarded as honour done to the dead, when the dead is carried home. If one buries his/her dead 'outside,' it can be used to curse or challenge one, say, "where did you bury your father? Or can you trace your father's tomb? The one who cannot bring his/her father/mother to be buried at home is regarded as unreliable and irresponsible. That is why people pray for children who will be reliable and responsible. So, it is a mark of honour. I think it is a good culture to carry one's dead home. This same tradition made Sapele people to

⁹²⁷ Respondent 20.

⁹²⁸ Interview with Deaconess Agnes O. Ofugara, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Sapele, 2 July 2012.

⁹²⁹ Zoma, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 50.

⁹³⁰ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 115.

make it a law that strangers at death should not be buried in Sapele but be carried to their different homelands for burial. It is a way of telling people to remember their homes, that where they come from is important.⁹³¹

Another respondent remembered the personal instruction that his father gave him in this regard,

My father said he has suffered so much in life. So, he decided to build an upstairs (a storey building). He told me he must not be buried outside. So, I told my people the wish of my father in his burial. It is regarded as honour to be buried inside the house. It is also regarded as protection over the tomb. It is a sign of being under a roof, under a cover.⁹³²

Yet, another respondent narrated a similar experience,

When my father was about to die, he called two of us, his sons and said, 'Well, I have a feeling I lived well and now that I am dying, you people have no tap root yet (meaning, you are not strong financially yet). So, defer my traditional burial till when you are mature.' So, he gave that instruction which we really complied with. He actually wanted to be given the befitting burial.⁹³³

The son understood correctly that their father wanted them to postpone his burial to such a time when they will be 'matured' in age and financial capability in order to give him a befitting burial as required by Urhobo tradition.

9.3 The Concept of Protection for the Bereaved

The Urhobo have the combined concepts of continuity and discontinuity between the deceased and the bereaved. On one hand they perform rites of union to procure the ancestral watch and benefits over the living. On the other hand, the rites of separation are carried out to maintain a safe gap between the living and the dead coupled with evil forces that are often associated with the spirit of death. During Urhobo burials, certain rituals to protect the bereaved are as follow, the eldest son of the deceased demonstrates

⁹³¹ Respondent 14. For burials in 'homesteads' in Africa, see Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 120.

⁹³² Respondent 7.

⁹³³ Respondent 19.

with cutlass, takes sand, turns it around the head and throws it on the casket, and matches on top of the grave after it has been covered. The widow of the deceased breaks *evwere* on top of the grave. The family shuts gun, sing separation and lamenting songs, buries the dead in the grave and covers it, the members wash themselves ceremonially after physical contact with the dead and/or the grave. All of these activities are meant to drive away evil forces from the living and separate the deceased from the bereaved.⁹³⁴

A respondent from Idjerhe narrated one of the rites of separation that the spirit of a dead farmer is kept away from his yam farm in which one of the yam sticks is turned upside down for three months.⁹³⁵ Another respondent revealed that a ritual of *evwe ovwirin* ('goat sacrifice to serve the farm' and separate the soul of the deceased from the farm) is used for a similar purpose in Oghara.⁹³⁶ The implication is that the spirit of the deceased has been ritually communicated that he/she has nothing to do again with the farm. If this rite is not performed, the Urhobo believe that the spirit of the dead can visit the farm as ghost and it will be dangerous for the living if they come in contact with it.

Another rite of separation involves *ihwo ri tu ushi* ('those who dug the grave'). They must fetch water to wash their legs, hands and faces ceremonially—washing away evil. A respondent from Olomu said, the washing ought not to be done in stagnant water or water fetched in a bucket but in a flowing stream in order for the spirit of the dead and death to flow away.⁹³⁷ In the burial of the late father of another respondent, there were two kinds of washing. The first was at the interment whereby all those who performed anything related to the grave whether digging, laying the corpse and dropping the sand,

⁹³⁴ This view is confirmed by all the respondents.

⁹³⁵ Respondent 1.

⁹³⁶ Respondent 9.

⁹³⁷ Respondent 13.

washed their hands and feet in front of the grave and threw the water on the street to show that they do not want death any more. The second was at the conclusion of the burial ceremony when the whole family members washed their bodies and clothes in a stream.⁹³⁸ The shooting of canons also serves the purpose of driving away the death related spirits and ghosts.⁹³⁹

In addition to the rite of breaking *ɛvwɛrɛ* on top of the grave, the widow performs other rites of separation in Urhobo burial, but not all the rites explained here are performed by one person. A widow may perform one or the other depending on her subculture. Except for these rites of marital separation, wife and husband do not have many physical roles to play in each other's burial than to be inside the house mourning while people visit her or him for condolence. The children and the family members have the responsibility of to bury the deceased.⁹⁴⁰ The husband does not follow the wife's corpse to the grave site; he stays in his house but sent his family members to the wife's family for the burial. The wife also does not always follow the husband's corpse to the grave.⁹⁴¹ In some cases, she is led there only to break the *ɛvwɛrɛ* and led back to her mourning room,⁹⁴² in other cases, when she is near the grave, she is led to walk backward and and tear a leaf into two and throw it backward towards the grave,⁹⁴³ and yet in other cases, she does not go to the grave at all, but at the appointed time during the burial, she is asked to lie by the side of the corpse of the late husband but in opposite direction.⁹⁴⁴ After fulfilling her separation rites (which ever is chosen) and other burial rites are completed, an arrangement is made for her upkeep by the husband's family. According to the narration

⁹³⁸ Respondent 20.

⁹³⁹ Respondent 13.

⁹⁴⁰ Respondent 23.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid.

⁹⁴² Respondents 1 and 5.

⁹⁴³ Respondent 6.

⁹⁴⁴ Respondents 15, 16, 17 and 23.

of one of the respondents, as soon as the burial is over, before the family members will depart, they share the deceased's wife/wives to the children/extended family members. By sharing, it means a member of the family could inherit her.⁹⁴⁵

However, there are cases whereby a widow may not want to marry anybody from the family; as she is not forced into the arrangement, she could then indicate to 'marry' her own child or children which is not in the literal sense. Rather, the woman is saying she will remain in the family unmarried in order that she can adequately care for her children. Then the family will oblige her and then she is bound to deceased husband's family and to maintain celibacy.⁹⁴⁶ But if the widow refuses to marry in the family and wants to be free entirely, her paternal family may refund the bride price to the husband's family as a rite to free her from her marital vow. It is believed that ignoring this cleansing and separation rite may cause problems for her and her children in the future since it is regarded as a taboo for her to have sexual relationship with any other man without performing the required rite.⁹⁴⁷ In a polygamous setting, the eldest son has the privilege of inheriting the youngest widow and the remaining widows allocated to relations who are younger to the deceased. But if there is only one widow, the family allocates her to one of the deceased's brothers.⁹⁴⁸

It is not only a woman who can refuse being inherited and re-married within the family as *ayuku* ('wife of inheritance'); a man to whom a woman is assigned may also decline. A female respondent had witnessed these two different aspects. She narrated how her

⁹⁴⁵ Zoma, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 51–52.

⁹⁴⁶ Respondent 4.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁸ Respondent 23; Zoma, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 51–52.

father's widow was shared to one of her brothers but he refused to marry his father's wife.⁹⁴⁹ She also revealed her own personal experience thus,

The same happened to me after my husband's death. They shared me to one man. I said I am too old for that and cannot marry again. They persuaded me not to worry, that it is just done to fulfil the custom.⁹⁵⁰

She further related what happened to her mate (co-widow),

My mate was shared to my own son, but he also declined. The lady summoned my son to court and was prepared to refund the dowry. My son however did not respond. He said he dashed her (forgoes) the money. The money to be returned is not the whole dowry but a token. It is believed that if it is not done, the children of the next union may fall sick and die.⁹⁵¹

When asked what becomes of her mate, she said, 'The woman left the family. She is now married to another man and already had two children for him. She did what she did to free herself.'⁹⁵² From my respondent's conclusion, it appears that the mate tried to fulfil the required tradition before leaving the late husband's family.

9.4 The Thematic Connections generated through the Fieldwork

The thematic connections that are found across the interviews concerning the significance of Urhobo burial are as follows:

1. Family Unity: Urhobo burial is communal—involving the extended family and the community in grieving, making and executing decisions and financing the burial. All the respondents emphasised the importance of the *emo* ('children') of the deceased carrying all the branches of the *orua* ('extended family')—consisting of the *iniovo*, the *emese*, the *emetuvwein*, the *eghweya* and the *ego* ('in-laws') along and involving them in the affairs of the burial of their person. The involvement includes the adequate

⁹⁴⁹ Respondent 11.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid.

⁹⁵² Ibid.

reporting, presentation of drinks,⁹⁵³ kola and monetary support at regular intervals and for different purposes. The emphasis is on communal living in joy or in pain. It also shows the importance of adequate communication with the family on what leads to the death of their person and involving them in decision making as relates to the burial. Mostly, the authority lies with the *orua*. Therefore the *emo* will experience smooth running of the burial of their parents if they respect and cooperate with the *ekpako* ('family elders') as discussed in chapter eight, section 8.4.2 and in this chapter, section 9.1.2.

2. Spiritual and Symbolic Activities: Urhobo burial is spiritual in the sense that there is a consciousness of dealing with the spirit of the dead and of the ancestors. Spiritual meanings are also attributed to symbolic performances like the pouring of libations, the offering of food to the dead, head shaving, the gesticulatory use of weapons and the use of the *abiba* ("native mat"), the *okpo oyibo* ("a yard of white cloth") and the *evwẹrẹ* ("native pot"). Concerning the last three objects, a respondent stated that,

They are kept by the elderly man for the three months, after which the family calls for the sharing of the inheritance. The materials are brought to represent the spirit of the dead during the sharing of inheritance. They also serve as the symbols or marks that the burial was well done and that every arm of the family was well represented. The materials are later kept in the family as memorials.⁹⁵⁴

Included in the spiritual and symbolic activities associated with Urhobo burial is the concept of respect and honour for the deceased. The common expression among the Urhobo when they are going for a burial ceremony is that they want to pay their last respect to the deceased. The motif of respect and honour for the deceased reaches its climax in *iye egọ* ('serving the ancestors') or *ihurhẹ* ('ancestor's shrine') and it

⁹⁵³ Examples are *udi uyẹrẹ* ('the wine for reporting'), *udi aihovwere* and *udi ugwhoro* ('wine for permission').

⁹⁵⁴ Respondent 1.

permeates all aspects of the traditional burial of the Idjerhe-Urhobo and other subcultures. The slaughtering of native cow and goats, the shaving of head, the dancing round the corpse, offering of items of drinks and food to the spirit of the deceased, shooting of canons/guns, carrying the dead to the ancestral home and burying within a residential quarter and the in-laws greeting are all parts of acts of respect for the deceased. Details concerning this respect have been discussed above in section 9.2.

3. The Urhobo burial is a traditional custom: There is an established custom without which Urhobo burial is regarded as improper or incomplete. This kind of approach is common with other cultures as Jesus was also buried according to Jewish custom.⁹⁵⁵ In Urhobo burial customs, the rites of separation are meant to protect the bereaved from spiritual pollution and evil forces associated with the spirit of death. Details are discussed above in section 9.3.

4. The Urhobo burial is ceremonial: The rites are both solemn and celebrative ceremonies to escort the deceased in his or her return journey 'home' to reunite with ancestors in *erivwin*. A responsible Urhobo person is not buried without ceremony.⁹⁵⁶ The duration of the ceremony also provides emotional healing for the bereaved and enables a transitional process for gradual recovery from their grief.

5. The Urhobo burial is a filial duty: It is children's duty to their parents and youth's to their elders. It is regarded as part of according honour and respects to parents, husbands and elders. In addition, this duty qualifies the children and other relations for

⁹⁵⁵ John 19: 40 'They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.'

⁹⁵⁶ Burial without ceremony in Urhobo is like burying a person as a fowl. See chapter one, section 1.4.

certain privileges like the sharing in the deceased's properties. If children do not give proper burial to their parents, it is regarded that they are carrying a perpetual burden. If they die, their own children must first bury the grand parents before burying them. The burial of parents therefore is a task that must be done.⁹⁵⁷ However, the Urhobo custom does not equally reciprocate this filial duty from parents to children, or elders to youths especially in burial. For instance small children are not given serious ritual burial; their bodies are simply disposed of. Husbands do not attend the burial of a wife as well. In addition, the Urhobo do not attend the interment of a younger person culturally.

6. Urhobo burial is a ritual of continuity: Proper burial is an indication that the deceased had capable children to keep his or her legacy. For example,

Some men will go and dress the senior son with the father's property (meaning the father's clothes) or if a woman, some women will dress the senior daughter with the mother's property. It is believed that the dead parent will not be happy if the children fail to wear their dress at burial and even after.⁹⁵⁸

The implication is that the children have replaced their parents as the parents have actually desired. If the children refuse to use their parents' clothes, the deceased's anger is manifested in form of *eghwoghwo* ('termites') to eat up the clothes. It is therefore a good prayer for an Urhobo person to say that *eghwoghwo* will not eat up your clothes, meaning that children will survive you. Proper burial also places the deceased in a capable situation of continuous relationship with descendants as an ancestor.

7. The Urhobo burial is an identity marker: It distinguishes between the social and gender status – titled/untitled, male/female, and the like. A respondent stated that 'the

⁹⁵⁷ Respondent 23.

⁹⁵⁸ Respondent 1.

way people cry at somebody's death and the way his/her burial is done shows how powerful and important that person is.⁹⁵⁹

8. The DSBC/NBC viewed most aspects of Urhobo burial as 'paganic,' socially risky and burdensome: A Baptist respondent explained these three major reasons for introducing the DSBC/NBC burial policy thus:

Well! In actual fact there were so many areas that needed to be changed. One, some of the rituals were paganic. Two, the social aspect of it were not Christian, we did not like it. Three, pressures on the Christians and the pastors. These were the three major areas.⁹⁶⁰

9. There are Urhobo Baptist members who are struggling to maintain a balance between their involvement with their community affairs and the church especially on the issue of burial: When asked, of the effectiveness of the policy, the same respondent above stated that,

People always want to go back to do things the way they are used to. Even after the day burial has been accepted as against night burial, some people still go back in the evening, especially for those who have in-laws, to dance throughout the night. But that is on the part of the native people, the church is no longer involved in that any more.⁹⁶¹

The problem that this research addressed is highlighted towards the end of the above remark that during burials, the Urhobo Baptists perform certain family traditions which the Baptist church did not approve but turns blind eyes to them.

In Summary, the thematic thread that runs through Urhobo funerals has the following features. The awareness of the presence of the spirit beings, the conscious acts of respectful assistance to the deceased and desire to please other ancestors, the prominent roles of the family elders and the involvement of the extended family and the

⁹⁵⁹ Respondent 2.

⁹⁶⁰ Respondent 3. More details are in chapter seven, section 7.2.6.

⁹⁶¹ Ibid.

community. Other important factors include the values placed on marriage, procreation, and male children, and filial responsibilities, long and prosperous life. The Urhobo emphasise these life issues during the crisis of death and thereby create an equilibrium in which their approach to death displays their meaning of life. They also emphasise a 'death-to-life' symbolism, the dead do not die, they are living, a thought which brings spiritual and emotional healing to the bereaved. It is the thought that the dead is living that makes the Urhobo to address a corpse like a living person. Even after the person is buried, they speak into the air believing the deceased is hearing. These Urhobo thought are not completely strange from the biblical concepts of passing from death to life.⁹⁶² Therefore, the Urhobo Baptists cannot and should not ignore the Urhobo idea of promoting life in the face of death during funeral rites. Rather, they should understand and aim to critically contextualize Urhobo funeral culture.

⁹⁶² John 5: 24, Romans 6: 13 and 1 John 3: 14.

CHAPTER TEN–CONCLUSION

This study has argued that the DSBC/NBC ought to relate its ministry to Urhobo funeral culture for the purpose of relevance. Vincent Onyebuchi Nwankpa presented a similar case of the need for relevance of the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) ministry to the Igbos. He then directed his study to the doctrines of God, spirits, sin and salvation among the Igbo ECWAs of Nigeria.⁹⁶³ This thesis maintains that the functions and symbols of Urhobo burial that do not undermine the gospel of Christ which the DSBC/NBC stands for should be incorporated into the Urhobo Baptist funeral liturgy. The research has however discovered that it is a very difficult task because the core function of Urhobo burial which is *iye ego* ('serving the ancestors' or 'homage to ancestors') is repugnant to Baptists who understood it as ancestor worship. Consequently, DSBC/NBC advocates a break with Urhobo funeral culture. Nevertheless, the argument in this study is that it is improper to condemn the entire Urhobo funeral culture because of its ancestor practices. Rather, there could be aspects of Urhobo burial which the DSBC could harmonise with its own funeral processes without any spiritual harm. For instance, the aspects of (1) respect, honour (devoid of worship that is due only to God) and keeping the good memories of the deceased, and not forgetting them, (2) family solidarity, (3) allowing a process of ceremony to effect proper emotional healing, (4), retaining but redirecting and reinterpreting certain Urhobo symbolic practices. Therefore what is proposed is a break with part, not all of the past. This approach has an evangelistic purpose to draw the Urhobo to Baptist faith.

⁹⁶³ Vincent Onyebuchi Nwankpa, *Understanding Cultural Perspectives, God's Words and Missions: A Powerful Tool for Theologizing* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2009), 7, 9, 111–161.

10.1 Symbolic Objects and Activities: Those to Retain or Reject

The DSBC cannot allow the acts of offering prayers and sacrifices like *atiekpe nunu* to the ancestors or the keeping of symbols that illustrate continuous fellowship of the living with the dead like the *ihurhe*, *opho*, *abiba*, *okpo oyibo*. The DSBC cannot also encourage practices like shaving of the head as a symbol of mourning,⁹⁶⁴ equipping the dead with weapons to avenge himself/herself upon his/her killers, throwing away some corpses into an evil forest because they are thought of as not clean or the shooting of guns to drive away evil spirits. The reasons are (1) such practices are against the Scriptures,⁹⁶⁵ (2) they are against Baptist doctrines,⁹⁶⁶ and (3) their continuous presence could make Urhobo minds to stray to ancestor worship because those materials have been culturally attached for that purpose.

However, the DSBC could encourage symbols and activities that reinforce the memory of the dead and their good works; such memory is not against the Scriptures.⁹⁶⁷ Therefore, the Urhobo Baptist funeral liturgy should provide ample space for memorialisation through the donation of materials like church furnishings, vehicles, or inauguration of projects like mission grants, endowment funds, naming buildings and

⁹⁶⁴ Christians ought not to mourn like non Christians. See 1 Thessalonians 4: 13, 'But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.' Leviticus 19: 27–28, 'You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD.' Deuteronomy 14: 1, 'You are children of the LORD your God. You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead.'

⁹⁶⁵ For example, see Deuteronomy 26: 14, 'I have not eaten of it while in mourning; I have not removed any of it while I was unclean; and I have not offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God, doing just as you commanded me.' Isaiah 8: 19 – 20, 'Now if people say to you, 'Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living for teaching and for instruction?' surely, those who speak like this will have no dawn!'

⁹⁶⁶ This point is discussed throughout the research and most especially in chapter nine, section 9.3.

⁹⁶⁷ 'Memoriam' is already an item of event during the annual Convention-in-session of NBC in which the Convention family observe a brief program of exhortation and prayer to mark the departure of all members who died within that Convention year. See Psalm 112: 6, 'For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered for ever.' In the scriptures, it was a thing of joy for one's name to be remembered. See Jeremiah 11: 19, Ezekiel 21: 32, and a sign of God's punishment for one's remembrance to be caught off. See Exodus 7: 14, 2 Samuel 18: 18, Psalm 34: 16.

halls, and others in memory of the deceased. There is however need for caution not to turn remembrance to worship of the dead. Meanwhile, the 2010 NBC Convention session in Abuja, condemned the practice of naming churches after the late Nigerian Baptist leaders. That decision is capable of making Urhobo Baptists develop a low esteem of their biological and spiritual ancestors.

Other practices which the DSBC cannot retain include the *oghwa eghorie* which is Urhobo spiritual design to assist the departed in rolling the load he/she is carrying to *erivwin*, the placing of a full maize cob in the hand of the deceased inside the coffin, and the use of alcoholic drinks to pour as libation, to appreciate special participants and purify the grave.⁹⁶⁸ Doctrinally, the Baptists do not believe in assisting the dead as their works on earth do follow them.⁹⁶⁹ They do not also believe that people are coming back to this life based on Hebrew 9: 27 and it is part of the Baptist Covenant not to use alcoholic drinks personally as a beverage or to entertain people.⁹⁷⁰ Nonetheless, in an attempt to be culturally sensitive, the Baptists with their emphasis on helping the bereaved could spiritualise the concept of *oghwa eghorie* in supporting the bereaved. They could also dwell on the Urhobo desire for a full life to emphasise abundant life in Christ, using Urhobo symbol of a full maize cob. The Baptist church could also redirect the use of the *evwe ehun* meal from being a sacrifice to the dead into becoming a family fellowship meal and meal of thanksgiving unto God.

⁹⁶⁸ Felicia Ohwovoriole, 'Eschatological Motifs and Socio-Spiritual Aspects of Urhobo Funeral Poetry,' *The Journal of International Social Research*, 3, no. 11 (Spring 2010), 445–454: 447.

⁹⁶⁹ Revelation 14: 13 reads, 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them.'"

⁹⁷⁰ 'Baptist Covenant' is usually written at the back of Baptist Hymnals and in the Constitution of Baptists Churches.

Symbolic speech by the eldest son of the deceased is another cultural phenomenon that needs attention. Before interment, the eldest son of a deceased prays to his father and to the ancestors on behalf of all other children.⁹⁷¹ This public and emotional performance is meant to meet the psycho-spiritual needs of the grieving people. The Baptist church could contextualise this aspect in the liturgy by allowing the eldest son or any family representative that is designated to present the family's prayer requests before the congregation. The worship leader and the congregation could then pray to God (not to the ancestors), concerning the requests. It is important to note that allowing the bereaved to speak out their prayers in the presence of God's people may be emotionally therapeutic and spiritually satisfying. In introduction to the Books of Psalms, *The African Bible* commentator recognised that Africans formerly address their prayers 'to God or to the ancestors as mediators,' but advised that they should understand that Jesus the Son of God has become their 'proto ancestor and mediator.'⁹⁷² Further efforts of contextualisation could include singing in Urhobo funeral tunes but with lyrics that do not violate the core-essence of Baptist faith in Christ. All supplications could be directed to God and not to the ancestors. The ancestors could be remembered and respected but not worshipped. The view of the next world is to be seen as life with God and not a return to this world.

Finally since the thought of having proper burial is strong among the Urhobo, the Baptist Church should handle it with all seriousness, showing concern and commitment to the bereaved and for the deceased. The deceased is no longer conscious of the Church's action according to Baptist viewpoint, but giving him or her a proper burial is

⁹⁷¹ Ohwovoriole, 'Eschatological Motifs and Socio-Spiritual Aspects of Urhobo Funeral Poetry,' 447.

⁹⁷² Zinkuratire and Colacrai, eds., *The African Bible*, 866.

a worthwhile duty because (1) the deceased belonged and was committed to the church, (2) the way the deceased is treated affects the bereaved positively or negatively, (3) the rest church members are watching what will become of them, and (4) unbelievers who attend the church because of the burial of their relation may be drawn to the church and to Christ because of the way the burial of their person is handled.

10.2 The Necessity of a Contextual Funeral Liturgy for the Urhobo Baptists

The DSBC/NBC needs a flexible approach of constructing Urhobo funeral programmes that are christologically shaped⁹⁷³ and culturally sensitive.⁹⁷⁴ They need to integrate the functions and symbols of both Baptist and Urhobo funeral rites. They could use such programme with emphasis on the Paschal Mystery to bring light and life out of darkness and death for both the dead and the living. As Sheppy puts it, ‘the story of God in Christ and the story of this dead person are interwoven.’⁹⁷⁵ The dead receives life by reunion with the Spirit of Christ and continuous memorialisation by the living descendants. The living also receives life by putting and renewing their faith in Christ and thereby becoming free from the fear of death. Sheppy suggested the Paschal Mystery ‘as a paradigm of the rite of passage which is heralded in the funeral,’⁹⁷⁶ meaning Christ is set as representative of the rites of separation, transition, and incorporation in the journey which the deceased and the bereaved must undertake.⁹⁷⁷ From his death to resurrection, Christ leads the way to God for both the dead and the living.⁹⁷⁸ Making the story of the cross of Christ and its three distinct aspects the foundation for a Urhobo

⁹⁷³ Sheppy, *Death and Funeral Liturgy, Volume I*, 78.

⁹⁷⁴ Imasogie, *Minister’s Manual*, 93.

⁹⁷⁵ Sheppy, *Death and Funeral Liturgy, Volume I*, 12.

⁹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 79–83.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

Baptist funeral liturgy will serve the purpose of preserving the core essence of Baptist faith in that funeral, no matter how much cultural sensitive it has been.

Presently (2012), among the Baptists in Urhobo Land, there are usually about four services organised by the church, namely, service of songs, funeral service, interment and outing thanksgiving. The service of songs is for about two hours and takes place in the family compound on the eve of the funeral service. The funeral service is also for about two hours in the church from where there is funeral procession to the grave site for interment. The outing thanksgiving is usually on another day, most often the Sunday following the funeral. A relevant and contextualised set of funeral services could be constructed to integrate the social aspect, with mission motif and to pay equal attention to the three anthropological stages in the rites of passage with Christ as the focus as follow—Christ died (Separation from the disciples, from earthly ministry), he was buried (Transition between crucifixion and resurrection), and he rose and ascended (Incorporation into God’s presence, and spiritual indwelling in his disciples).⁹⁷⁹ Christ’s pattern could then become the arrow head for both the dead and the living. In addition, the Baptist church could allow Urhobo families to organise memorial services for their deceased as often as each family could afford in the years that follow.

In preparing a contextualised funeral liturgy, a Baptist minister may find some of the insights presented below helpful. They are compiled through consultation with Urhobo Baptists. It is however expected that ministers will be flexible under the leadership of

⁹⁷⁹ This ritual pattern is based on the message of the cross of Christ according to 1Corinthians 15: 3–4 which reads, ‘For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.’

the Holy Spirit, with the choice of scriptural texts,⁹⁸⁰ hymns,⁹⁸¹ cultural songs and the arrangement of the items of events in each of the services, depending on the circumstance of the family, the church and the community.

10.2.1 *Ega r' ine vwevu re egodo* ('Songs service in the family compound')

I. *Kristi ghwuru* ('Christ died')

1.	<i>Emwuo phiyo ega na</i>	Call to worship – Romans 14: 9 'For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.'
2.	<i>Une r'ojaeriq ri Kristi vwe ru gbagba</i>	Hymns of Christ's Suffering
3.	<i>Ikuegbe vwọ kpa he (X)</i>	Testimonies about (the Deceased)
4.	<i>Erhovwo r'akpewwe vwọ k'akpo re (X)</i>	Prayer of Thanksgiving for the life of (the Deceased)

II. *Eshi Kristi* ('Christ was buried')

5.	<i>Esereta rine evu re ota rOghene rhe</i>	Scripture Reading – oga ra kpe <i>erivwin</i> ('the realm of the dead'), 1 Peter 3: 18–4: 6
6.	<i>Erhovwo akpewwe kiruo riKristi</i>	Prayer of Thanksgiving for the work of Christ

III. *Kristi vre re yeri kpenu* ('Christ rose and ascended')

7.	<i>Une re phi okparobo/Une re ebuine</i>	Hymns of Victory' or Anthems by choir(s)
8.	<i>Ikuesiri ravwo rho vwe we</i>	Exhortation
9.	<i>Erhovwo robruche vwọ ke orua na</i>	Prayer for God's comfort for the family
10.	<i>Erhovwo re evwo hu hega ve erohovwo ro ba re vwo kpo</i>	Closing prayer and Benediction

⁹⁸⁰ Appropriate scriptures may include Psalm 73: 24–26; John 14: 1–3; Romans 8: 18–39; 1 Corinthians 15: 50–58; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13–18; Revelation 7: 13–17; 14: 13 (See Imasogie, *Minister's Manual*, 88).

⁹⁸¹ Relevant hymns apart from the ones used here include 'Because He lives,' 'Trials dark on every hand,' 'It is well with my soul,' 'When we all get to heaven,' 'The Strife is o'er,' 'Shall we gather at the river,' 'Safe in the arms of Jesus,' 'Only remembered,' 'When upon life billows you are tempest tossed,' and the such.

11.	<i>Emu o re ve idi e da</i>	Refreshment
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10.2.2 *Ega r'orivwi vwevu ruvwevwi r'ega na* ('Funeral service in the church')

I. *Kristi o ghwuru*

1.	<i>E reyo re orivwi na vwe ururhoro</i>	'Acceptance of the corpse' at the Porch way
2.	<i>Une ravwo ya ruęga vwe ese reta rOghene</i>	Processional Hymn' with Sentences ⁹⁸²
3.	<i>Emwuo phiyọ reęa na</i>	Call to worship–John 19: 30
4.	<i>Esereta rine evu re ota rOghene rhe</i>	Scripture–John 19: 33–37
5.	<i>Ine Suo re ibuine yere ihwefa</i>	Hymns or Special Songs by choir(s) or any other person
6.	<i>Ota re Oghene</i>	The Word of God–Message of Consolation and Salvation

II. *Eshi Kristi*

7.	<i>Erhovwo ra vwọ re k'orua na</i>	Intercession for the family
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The officiating minister may allow the *omoshare rokpako* ('first son') or a family representative to present their burden and prayer requests for which the congregation will intercede. And the minister may say,

In his burial, Christ entered the realm of darkness and because He is light, darkness could not overcome him. Now let us intercede for our brethren who are at this moment experiencing dark hours of life that Christ may let his light shine in their souls. Amen.

III. *Kristi vrę re yeri kpenu*

⁹⁸² The Sentences may include, 'Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die (John 11: 25–26), 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades' (Revelation 1: 17–18), 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them"' (Revelation 14: 13), and the like.

8.	<i>Une r' imuero</i>	Hymns of Assurance' of God's guide and comfort
9.	<i>Emurrio eriyọ rovwovwo na r'Orovwori</i>	Lord's Supper
10.	<i>Oke r'o rua vwo ruese vwo kivwo</i>	Presentation of Memorials and Souvenirs by the family
11.	<i>Aghwoghwo ihwo evughe uyere</i>	Announcements, Recognitions, Greetings and Appreciations of those who attended the ceremony. The church can at this time recognise different arms of the family like <i>iniovo</i> , <i>emese</i> and others.
12.	<i>Kuega phiyo ve Ese ro phe</i>	Closing Prayer and Benediction

10.2.3 *Ega re ebrowiotor vwe esushi na* ('Interment service at the grave site')

I. *Kristi o ghwuru*

1.	<i>Une</i>	Hymn
2.	<i>Erhovwo re vwo sue erhire Oghene vwoto</i>	Prayer to invoke the Spirit of God and to bound evil spirits who may want to interfere

II. *Eshi Kristi*

3.	<i>Esereta rine evu re ota rOghene rhe</i>	Scripture, John 19: 38–42
4.	<i>Esho re orivwi na</i>	Committal

The minister says,

For as much as it has pleased God, in His wise providence, to take out of this world our brother/sister 'X.' We therefore commit his/her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust [the spouse, the children and selected family members can follow after the pastor to perform this aspect of earth to earth, ashes to ashes and dust to dust]; looking for the general resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in Him shall be changed, and made like unto His own glorious body; according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.⁹⁸³

⁹⁸³ Aworinde, *The Minister's Manual*, 31–32.

5.	<i>Esho re orivwi na</i>	Covering of the grave with Hymn
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The minister at this point could allow the *omoshare okpako* ('eldest son') of the deceased to march over the covered grave firmly compacting the sand with his feet and at the same time allow the widow to break *evwere* (traditional dish) as a symbol of separation of marital and domestic duties because death has parted her from her husband.

III. *Kristi vrę re yeri kpenu*

6.	<i>Erovwo rehworhefua ro ruona ve ihwejobire rhiegana</i>	Prayer of Sanctification for the family and all who attended
7.	<i>Une re evwo hu he gana</i>	Closing Hymn
8.	<i>Ęserophe r'Oghene</i>	Benediction

10.2.4 *Emue rio ve idi ęda /Owe koko omavwęrovwę vwe vu r'egodo ro rua na* (**'Refreshment'/ Social gathering 'in the family compound'**)

The family is usually in charge of this aspect but may sometimes ask the church to moderate. The family may include in-laws greetings here or set another day for it. If the church leads, then, it may follow this program.

1.	<i>Ęrovwo</i>	Prayer
2.	<i>Uyovwi-echiyo</i>	Welcome and presentation of kola by the family
3.	<i>Ęrhovwo k'emu v'idi</i>	Presentation and Blessing of Refreshment materials
4.	<i>Emu o re ve idi ę da kugbe ihwohwo</i>	Refreshment and Entertainment with background music or live music bands
5.	<i>Uyere-ego</i>	The in-laws greetings can go on simultaneously with the above if scheduled for the same day
6.	<i>Okę r'okę</i>	Presentation of Souvenirs and gifts if any
7.	<i>Ęrovwo re evwo hu hega ve ęserophe</i>	Closing prayer and Benediction

8.	<i>Oke r'ukpo</i>	Departure
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10.2.5 *Eghwie ra afio rivwi ve Ega rakpewwe* ('Outing and Thanksgiving service' in the church)

Imasogie had rightly observed that this service contextualises the traditional sacrifice to mark the end of a mourning period⁹⁸⁴ and that 'the bereaved individuals are now free from the restrictions associated with the period.'⁹⁸⁵ The service is part of a regular Sunday service following the burial or at any other time agreeable to the family. Within the service, the pastor calls the family and those who accompany them to the front of the altar as he deems fit to pray for them and after which offering is collected. The service dovetails into the next as church members, friends and relatives follow the bereaved to their house for prayers and feast to symbolically mark the end of the mourning period.⁹⁸⁶ Practically however, the very close relations like the spouse and the children of the deceased needed more time for emotional healing of their grief. Hence, there could be rationale for later ceremonies after three months or a year.

10.2.6 *Ega rehworhefua vwevu re uvwevwi* ('Sanctification service in the house')

This service is in existence already although informally in Urhobo Land. However, a minister may make it official and include it in the programmes that will be printed for all the participants. Sheppy recognised this type of service as a good example of contextualization of Maori traditions into the funeral liturgy of the New Zealand

⁹⁸⁴ Imasogie, *Minister's Manual*, 92.

⁹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

Anglican Church.⁹⁸⁷ Like outing thanksgiving, the sanctification service is overtly an incorporation rite showing that the dead is ‘at rest’ and those living are ‘protected from the forces of evil.’⁹⁸⁸

1.	<i>Erhovwo rẹ vwo sio Oghẹnẹ wotọ</i>	Prayer of invocation
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Open, O God, the door of this house;
enter it and let your light shine here,
to drive away all darkness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.⁹⁸⁹

2.	<i>Erhovwo r’Orovwori</i>	The Lord’s Prayer to be recited by all present
3.	<i>Erhovwo ra vwo hwo rhe uvwevwi na fua</i>	Anointing of rooms and other spaces in the house with oil and prayers,

We anoint and cleanse this place
to wash away the effects of all evil,
whether of people, or of spiritual powers,
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.⁹⁹⁰

4.	<i>Erhovwo r’obruche vẹ ufuoma kẹ itu ri vwe ruvweri na</i>	Prayer of comfort and peace for the mourners
5.	<i>Une</i>	Hymn
6.	<i>Ese rọ phẹ</i>	Benediction

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

7.	<i>Emu-siobọ-uvwevwi</i>	Closing meal fellowship
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⁹⁸⁷ Sheppy, *Death and Funeral Liturgy, Volume II*, 57–59, 177.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid. Adapted from Maori Anglican liturgy in Sheppy which however used sprinkling with water instead of anointing with oil. I prefer anointing with oil to sprinkling with water because the Urhobo Baptists are more familiar with it.

10.3 Baptist and Contextuality

This section is subdivided into two parts. The first identifies Baptist historic contextual nature in support of the argument for contextual liturgy. It serves as ground work for the second section which focuses closely on the contents of the proposed liturgy in this thesis.

10.3.1 Baptist Faith and Practices are Contextual in Nature

The Baptist doctrines and practices like soul competency, priesthood of all believers, autonomy of local church, congregational polity and religious liberty are contextual in nature as they evolved based on due recognition of spiritual and political contexts of individuals and groups of Baptist believers in different places and times. Robert E. Johnson, the editor of *American Baptist Quarterly* observed these contextual underpinnings by stating that ‘different expressions of Baptist life have emerged as individuals and communities have interpreted the biblical texts, Christian traditions, and human societies in varied ways.’⁹⁹¹ Describing further the cultural setting in which Baptist faith emerged and is emerging, Johnson wrote,

The Baptist movement began in a cultural context specific to Britain in the seventeenth century, was significantly reshaped by a variety of “frontier” experiences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was molded (sic., moulded) again by its encounter with urban and scientific cultures in the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, and is undergoing a new process of redefinition and formation consequent upon an emerging global Baptist reality. Baptists’ varied ways of responding to the reshaping experiences of these cultural shifts hold the clues to interpreting Baptist identity and comprehending the movement in its many facets.⁹⁹²

⁹⁹¹ Robert E. Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.

⁹⁹² ‘Robert E. Johnson: Academic Dean and Professor of Christian Heritage,’ available from https://www.cbts.edu/admin/tiny_mce/useruploads/files/Johnson%20Bio.pdf, Internet, accessed 10 December 2012.

Walter B. Shurden, the founding executive director of the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia⁹⁹³ also identified similar situation among the twentieth century Southern Baptists, remarking that within each half of that century, ‘one can see a distinct and contrasting vision of what it means to be Baptist [...] at mid-century and at the end of the century.’⁹⁹⁴ These differences notwithstanding, Shurden maintained that Baptist ‘historic love of freedom’⁹⁹⁵ and ‘the centrality of the individual in matters of faith’⁹⁹⁶ remain its distinctive marks historically and theologically.⁹⁹⁷ Johnson likewise highlighted Baptist freedom and individuality⁹⁹⁸ as common phenomena across different Baptists. Although Johnson has Anglo-American background, having hailed from Virginia, he assessed Baptists globally and concluded that ‘what it meant to be Baptist could not at the same time remain static and retain its value.’⁹⁹⁹ In other words, Baptists are not static but dynamic as a result of “‘traditioning processes” [...] in which the status quo intersects with efforts and desires to change the status quo.’¹⁰⁰⁰ Johnson recognised regular tension among Baptists whether in the Anglo-American missionaries’ home churches, where ‘certain long-held practices and definitions of Baptist identity could not adequately fit the new contexts,’ or between those missionaries and their audiences in other parts of the globe. Johnson therefore

⁹⁹³ ‘Walter B. Shurden,’ available from <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/staff/shurden.htm>, accessed 10 December 2012.

⁹⁹⁴ Walter B. Shurden, ‘What “Being Baptist” meant for Southern Baptists during World War II’ *Baptist History and Heritage*, 36 no. 3 (Summer-Fall 2001), 6–16: 14.

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9. Shurden underscored that Baptist concepts like

(1) personal conversion, (2) a voluntary and democratic local church, (3) the authority of the New Testament, (4) the separation of church and state, and (5) religious liberty [...] evolved out of (Baptist) ‘basic theological belief in the value, worth and centrality of the individual person (*Ibid.*, 8–9).

⁹⁹⁸ Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches*, 429–430. Johnson itemised the followings among Baptist core values: (1), ‘the freedom of a local faith community to determine its own theological definitions.’ (2) ‘The need for individuals to pursue truth in terms that are meaningful to them in their particular life contexts.’ (3), ‘an innate sense of the inadequacy of simply living a life of faith that is controlled by rules and experiences of someone else’s faith.’

⁹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Essick John Inscore, Review of Robert E. Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) in *Baptist History and Heritage*, 47, no. 1 (Peer Reviewed Journal, Cengage Learning Inc., Spring 2010), 74–76: 75.

emphasised the need for each ‘local Baptist faith community [...] to exercise faith for themselves and define its meaning within their own contexts [...] in order to achieve full humanity.’¹⁰⁰¹

Baptist preaching is contextual. Robert Stephen Reid, who was a Baptist Pastor in USA before becoming an educator, examined ‘a constitutive Baptist rhetoric [...] to discover ways Baptist identity functions as a source of rhetorical invention.’¹⁰⁰² In his view, ‘becoming Baptist meant (he) was given freedom to encounter the Bible as text and to try to determine its meaning(s) without being forced to accept someone else’s prescribed interpretation.’¹⁰⁰³ Reid thus interpreted this concept for a Baptist preacher as ‘oral engagement with the meaning of the ancient text in such a way that this *Word* “once delivered to the saints [of old]” is re-contextualized to speak to a new generation of Christians.’¹⁰⁰⁴ In this contextual preaching, the contexts of both the preacher as an individual and that of the congregation as a group are paramount.

Baptist Confessions and Statements of Faith are not regarded as creeds. They are therefore contextual and are subjected to periodical revisions depending on the group, their time, circumstance and experience.¹⁰⁰⁵ Put succinctly by Shurden, Baptists are not creedal people.¹⁰⁰⁶ Consequently, he expressed further, that the BFM of 1925 does not have such power on the Baptists as a Book of Concord has on the Lutherans, a Book of Common Prayer on the Episcopalians, and a Westminster Confession on the

¹⁰⁰¹ Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches*, 430.

¹⁰⁰² Robert Stephen Reid, ‘Being Baptist,’ *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 7, no. 4 (Michigan State University Press, winter 2004), 587–601: 587–588.

¹⁰⁰³ *Ibid.*, 588.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 589.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Shurden, ‘What “Being Baptist” meant for Southern Baptists during World War II,’ 6.

Presbyterians.¹⁰⁰⁷ This understanding could account for the revisions of the BFM in 1963, 1998 and 2000 as indicated in chapter six, section 6.3. The preamble to the 2000 edition partly reads,

Our confessions of faith are rooted in historical precedent, as the church in every age has been called upon to define and defend its beliefs. Each generation of Christians bears the responsibility of guarding the treasury of truth that has been entrusted to us [2 Timothy 1:14]. Facing a new century, Southern Baptists must meet the demands and duties of the present hour.¹⁰⁰⁸

The committee also articulated the occasion that necessitated the revision in each case,

New challenges to faith appear in every age. A pervasive anti-supernaturalism in the culture was answered by Southern Baptists in 1925, when the Baptist Faith and Message was first adopted by this Convention. In 1963, Southern Baptists responded to assaults upon the authority and truthfulness of the Bible by adopting revisions to the Baptist Faith and Message. The Convention added an article on "The Family" in 1998, thus answering cultural confusion with the clear teachings of Scripture. Now (meaning the year 2000), faced with a culture hostile to the very notion of truth, this generation of Baptists must claim anew the eternal truths of the Christian faith.¹⁰⁰⁹

Shurden however later remarked that the ‘antireedal attitude of Southern Baptists underwent radical metamorphosis by the end of the (twentieth) century, as fundamentalists captured and creedalized the SBC.’¹⁰¹⁰ This comment by Shurden adequately aligns with the observation of Paul J Sheppy earlier mentioned in chapter six, section 6.3 that although Baptists perceived themselves as non-liturgical and non-creedal, their patterns, services and practices are not completely independent of creedal churches.¹⁰¹¹

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Rogers and others, available from <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp>; Internet, accessed 27 November 2012.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁰ Shurden, ‘What “Being Baptist” meant for Southern Baptists during World War II,’ 6.

¹⁰¹¹ Sheppy, *Death, Liturgy and Ritual Volume II*, 124–126.

The offshoot of Baptist religious liberty is congregational polity and democratization which is rightly described as the effect of Baptist influence or ‘*Baptistification*’ in American religion even in a creedal denomination like Roman Catholic.¹⁰¹² Reid observed a great diversity among Baptist preachers and leaders and concluded that their ‘unity of identity’ was fashioned out as a way of commonly responding to their ‘historic rejection.’¹⁰¹³ In Reid’s opinion, each Baptist individual or congregation is likely to prefer its authentic nature to the synthetic one. He expressed it thus:

In viewing Baptists through the lens of social movement theory, I would suggest that a Baptist unity of identity arises from its historic rejection of outside authority, that the notion of Baptist commonality is deeply rooted in its tradition of dissent from the normalizing effect of confessional consensus, that Baptists find radical extension of choice preferable to the structure of tradition, and that Baptists may indirectly prefer the chaos of re-genesis to the synthetic order that finds its identity by continually reinstituting one fixed moment of genesis.¹⁰¹⁴

The change of NBC executive/administrative head’s nomenclature from ‘General Secretary’ to ‘President’¹⁰¹⁵ this year (2012), mentioned in chapter one, section 1.3.2 is a departure from its parent body, SBC and indicates that Baptist administration is also contextual. Since NBC is able to freely express itself administratively as distinct from its mother SBC, and yet remains within the fold of Baptist family, this thesis argues that NBC ought to encourage similar Baptist¹⁰¹⁶ spirit of diversity in unity and unity in diversity in relation with its branches and different aspects of a local congregational operation. Giving room for such freedom and individuality does not negate provision of guidelines by the Convention. The danger however is that in an attempt to provide

¹⁰¹² Reid, ‘Being Baptist,’ 589.

¹⁰¹³ Ibid., 591.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁵ The understanding of the concept of a Secretary as heading administration is not the same in Nigeria as in USA. A secretary in Nigerian context is understood as more of a servant of the group than a head, while the designation President is readily understood as leader. Examples are president of a society or of a nation. Thus Nigerians can easily understand the idea of a church denomination being headed by a Bishop, an Arc Bishop, Prelate, or a President than a Secretary.

¹⁰¹⁶ ‘Baptistic’ is a usual expression among Nigerian Baptists to mean ‘belonging to the Baptists’ or ‘Baptist in nature.’

measures of checks and balances between individual liberty and corporate accountability, guidelines may turn to rules. For instance, the current NBC President's statement presented below is capable of heading in either of the directions.

We practice the principle of local church autonomy that is within the sphere of what the whole Convention holds as sacred. The autonomy of the local church is not an irresponsible freedom or license to do anything one wants. Local church autonomy stops once it contradicts the Convention norms. Every local Baptist church is independent yet interdependent as it freely relates with other churches.¹⁰¹⁷

10.3.2 Rationale for the Proposed Liturgy as Mediating between Baptist Faith and Urhobo Culture

Since it is certain as analysed above that Baptist way of life, preaching, confessions of faith and administration are scriptural and contextual, it is proper that its liturgy also, having first drawn inspiration from Christ, the Bible and Holy Spirit, bears the mark of the people's indigenous spiritual and socio-cultural contexts. Reid noted from pietism and social action backgrounds, that 'Baptist worship is characterized by a culturally adaptive rather than a formal, tradition-centered liturgy'¹⁰¹⁸ and that persuasion is an integral part of Baptist preaching.¹⁰¹⁹ Imposition is certainly unbaptistic. The NBC/DSBC burial policy examined in this study draws a dividing line between Nigerian cultural backgrounds and what it regards as 'Christian standards.'¹⁰²⁰ To address the dichotomy thus created, the proposed contextual liturgy in this thesis provides a mediating effect between NBC position and Urhobo tradition.

¹⁰¹⁷ S. O. A. Ayokunle, 'Defining Our Identity,' *Nigerian Baptist Convention 2012 Diary*, 3. See also, Convention President, 'Defining Our Identity,' President's Speeches, available from http://www.nigerianbaptist.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=36:convention-president&catid=3:general-admin&Itemid=3, Internet, accessed 27 November 2012.

¹⁰¹⁸ Reid, 'Being Baptist,' 591–592.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 592

¹⁰²⁰ *Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention*, 1. See Appendix 4.

The policy emphasises financial modesty without addressing modesty relativism. It also discourages wake keeping because of the burden of its expenses on the bereaved and the likely negative social practices. It however ignores the value of the companionship and solidarity that wake keeping provides, the symbolic sacrifice of staying awake with loved ones in their dark hours because they are experiencing the odd and dark stages of life. In addition, the policy recommends immediate burial and discourages any performance of burial in stages whereas, delayed burial and ceremonies in stages culturally and efficiently provide the time needed for emotional healing of grief and bereavement among the Urhobo. The policy thus reflects a hardliner position and incongruent with Urhobo culture. Consequently, this study argues that given the socio-cultural and emotional needs of Urhobo Baptists passing through bereavement, a ‘bottom-up’ instead of ‘top-down’¹⁰²¹ funeral liturgy is necessary.

This liturgy provides a mediating ground for Baptist faith and Urhobo culture in a number of ways. It is sensitive to Urhobo culture without compromising the Baptist faith in Christ, the Scripture and the Holy Spirit. To start with, the structure of all the programs presented from section 10.2.1 to 10.2.6 in this chapter is patterned after the Paschal Mystery—Christ’s death, descent to the dead and resurrection. Sheppy explained this approach as discussed earlier in chapter three, section 3.5 as ‘theological anthropological,’¹⁰²² a way of providing ‘Christological response to death.’¹⁰²³ It is Christological, scriptural¹⁰²⁴ spiritual and baptistic as it relates the death of an Urhobo Baptist with Christ’s. It is also cultural; making the death of an Urhobo Baptist to find meaning and hope in Christ’s death and resurrection. Thus Urhobo Baptist who ‘sleeps

¹⁰²¹ The term ‘bottom up’ liturgy is used in this study to refer to a liturgy that evolves from the people and within their context while a ‘top-down’ one means the one which is imposed on them.

¹⁰²² Sheppy, *Death, Liturgy and Ritual Volume I*, 74–75.

¹⁰²³ Sheppy, *Death, Liturgy and Ritual Volume II*, 1.

¹⁰²⁴ 1 Corinthians 15: 3–4.

in the Lord'¹⁰²⁵ spends eternity with *Ijesu Krisiti vẹ Oghẹnẹ* ('Jesus Christ and God') and those ancestors who were also in Christ in *ojuvwu* ('heaven') instead of with unbelieving ancestors in *erivwi* ('abode of the dead').

In addition, the practice of addressing the dead in living terms reflects sensitivity to Urhobo culture which holds that the dead lives among his living relatives but from a spiritual realm. This perspective is similar to the biblical concept expressed in Luke 20: 38 which reads, 'Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive' (*Asakiephana ọ dia Oghẹnẹ rẹ ihwo ighweghwu-u, ẹkẹvuọvo ọ rẹ ihwo ekpokpo; kiddie ayen ejobi rhọ vwọ kẹ*). This passage with reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, means that though they were dead, God reckoned them as living. Similarly, Urhobos do not lose the sight of their departed ancestors; they continue to live with them spiritually and memorably. Urhobo understand resurrection as both now and in future, or with relations and with God. Hence, the liturgy encourages respect and remembrance for Urhobo ancestors. It however redirects their hope of salvation away from the ancestors to Christ and re-orientates them that their final destination is not *erivwi* but resurrection, eternal life with God in heaven.

Furthermore, the liturgy provides adequate focus on all the characters involved; Christ, the deceased and the bereaved. The Baptist policy focuses on Christ and the bereaved, neglecting the deceased; but to ignore the deceased demonstrates a major insensitivity to Urhobo culture. The liturgy places Christ at the centre and causes both the deceased and the bereaved to behold Christ from opposite directions. Both could find meaning for their death and life in Christ and are as well could be reconciled in him. For instance, program 10.2.1, section I, item 2, section II, items 5 and 6, program 10.2.2, section III,

¹⁰²⁵ 'Sleeps in the Lord' is Christian expression meaning death (See 1 Thessalonians 4: 13–18).

item 9, focused on Christ whereas program 10.2.1, section I, items 3 and 4, program 10.2.2, section III, item 10 focused on the deceased. Program 10.2.1, section III, items 9 and 11, program 10.2.2, section III, item 8 on the bereaved while many of the remaining items are capable of sundry applications and focuses.

Another mediating nature of this liturgy is that on the one hand, it retains certain core aspects of extant Baptist funeral liturgy like the use of hymns, scriptures and exhortation. On the other hand, it incorporates aspects of Urhobo culture. Examples include the bilingual presentation of the liturgy which is an adequate recognition and promotion of Urhobo language, an integral part of their culture. There are also verbal presentation of the prayerful wish of the family and matching on the grave by *omoshare okpako* as indicated in program 10.2.2, section II, below item 7 and program 10.2.3, section III, item 5 respectively. In programs 10.2.4, 10.2.5 and 10.2.6, Urhobo socio-cultural activities of refreshment and entertainment of participants at funeral ceremonies, their concepts of proper conclusion of burial *eghwię rafi orivwi* ('outing') and *ęhworhefua* ('cleansing') are adapted for Baptists use.

Urhobo tradition thus constitutes important part of this liturgy although with Baptist moderation. Such moderation include abstaining from the use of intoxicating drinks, performance of social activities in a worship atmosphere, absence of traditional prayers and sacrifices like *atiekpe nunu* or libation to the deceased, discouragement of worship of ancestors or keeping materials like *ihurhę, opho, abiba, okpo oyibo* that could suggest same. In the spirit of this liturgy, Urhobo Baptists are also discouraged from shaving to mourn the dead or equipping the dead suspected to have been killed with dangerous weapons to avenge themselves. Baptists as taught to understand happenings

in their lives as belonging to either the perfect or permissive will of God, and that ‘all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.’¹⁰²⁶ Therefore nothing, not even premature death of a family member should separate them from the love of Christ.¹⁰²⁷

The proposed liturgy is not rigid. It provides guidelines, not all the details of all the words, scriptures¹⁰²⁸ and hymns as usual with the Roman Catholic and Anglican orders. It thus captures and expresses the historic Baptist freedom and flexibility. Analysis of the components of the service of songs in the family compound in 10.2.1 as representative of other programs demonstrates the richness of the liturgy in its references to Christ, Scripture, Baptist and Urhobo traditions.

Call to worship: This is a traditional Nigerian Baptist way of starting worship services. The choice of the text, Romans 14: 9, to emphasise Christ’s Lordship over both the living and the dead is however, to underscore that the dead are not forgotten by God and therefore, the living should not cast aspersion on the dead nor demonise them. With such understanding, the Urhobo Baptists expression of love towards their dead should not be misplaced but celebrated.

Hymns of Christ’s suffering: This item provides the opportunity to view the people’s suffering including death through Christ’s suffering exemplified in his death on the cross.

Testimonies about the deceased: It is the duty of remembrance, a way of treasuring their good memories and learning from their ups and downs. It confronts living with the reality of death and helps them to check themselves as they stand before God, knowing that the dead was once standing like them and they will one day lie like the dead.

¹⁰²⁶ Romans 8: 28.

¹⁰²⁷ Romans 8: 38–39.

¹⁰²⁸ Scriptures given are only samples; alternative relevant scriptures can as well be used.

Prayers of thanksgiving for the life of the deceased: The Bible verse that precedes this liturgy's call to worship reads, 'If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.'¹⁰²⁹ Acknowledging that it is God who gives and sustains life, it is understood that the dead has lived by God's grace and therefore God should be praised for the opportunity. It teaches the living the lesson of surrendering to God in all things. Therefore, this item is not only looking at the deceased but much more orientating the living to trust and reliance on God.

Scripture Reading, 1 Peter 3: 18 – 4: 6: The relevance of this passage is that it elicits insight into Christ's concern for the dead before his crucifixion, as he went to the realm of the dead for their sake and became victorious over the powers of death and the grave.

Prayer of thanksgiving for the work of Christ: The sacrificial work of Christ, his death and resurrection changed curse into blessing and death into a gate to life. This funeral liturgy recognises Christ death as the power that removes the sting of the believer's death and his resurrection as what provides a better hope than the hope with human ancestors. Therefore, the service is full of thanks to God in Christ Jesus.

Hymns of Victory: As Christ's resurrection shames his crucifixion, hymns of Christ's victory over powers of sin and darkness, death and sickness are provided for in this liturgy. Believers in Christ by faith are likewise victorious over those forces.

Exhortation: Preaching is important in Baptist tradition. Samuel Ola Fadeji (1941–2007, NBC General Secretary 1991–2001), explained the centrality of preaching in NBC with its churches' altar arrangement of placing pulpit between baptistery and Lord's Supper table.¹⁰³⁰ Preaching or exhortation features prominently in this liturgy in

¹⁰²⁹ Romans 14: 8

¹⁰³⁰ Samson O. T. Ajagbe, *Ebenezer Baptist Church Sapele, 'The Beautiful,' Our Church Building: The Physical Representation of the Spiritual* (Orhuwhorhun, Warri: Globec Glorious Publishers, 2011), 17.

the family compound and in the church, as Baptists are good at using every opportunity to witness Christ.

Prayer for God's comfort for the family: This item is a concern for the bereaved to experience a peaceful rite of passage as they adjust from a life with to a life without their loved one.

Closing prayer and Benediction: commends the bereaved and every participant to God for safe keeping in this life and in the life to come. It is a desire and prayer that God may keep and cause all people to recognise Him as their chief owner now and in eternity.

In his commentary on funeral liturgical texts of different church traditions, Sheppy raised the following questions:

- What kind of anthropological view does the rite take?
- Does the text suggest a rite of passage, or does it simply mark a closure? Does it suggest that the rite takes a retrospective or a prospective view of the occasion? Is death seen as the end or as a gateway?
- How is the balance held between expressing the common nature of our mortality and the individuality of this particular human life now ended?
- Is judgement or hope the principal eschatological note?
- Where does the priority of focus lie between deceased and bereaved? Does the text suggest or exclude the idea that something is being transacted for the one who has died?
- How does the text reveal a Christological response to these questions?¹⁰³¹

The purpose of quoting the above questions here is not to list how the liturgy in this thesis addresses them but to underscore that it falls within the scope. It confronts the participants with the reality of their mortality and equally comforts them through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁰³² Therefore, both the deceased and the bereaved look to the cross for better life beyond death, eternal life with God. Hence, this

¹⁰³¹ Sheppy, *Death, Liturgy and Ritual Volume II*, 1.

¹⁰³² 1Corinthians 15: 54–57.

liturgy is rooted in Baptist's emphases on Christ, Scripture and flexibility which makes it contextual with Urhobo funeral context.

10.4 Conclusion

The goal of this research has been to assess the religious/cultural dilemma that confronts Urhobo Baptists in the performance of their funeral obligations. While the proposition of the DSBC and the NBC that converts ought to break away with certain aspects of their former religions as a proof of conversion, is unarguable, nevertheless, these bodies need to answer certain missiological questions. For instance, which aspect and to what extent should a convert forsake the past? Does forsaking the past mean forsaking the convert's culture and context? Or does it mean concession without any attempt to create disunity within the person of the convert? The primary argument in this thesis is that it is possible, valuable and advantageous to integrate vital aspects of Urhobo funeral rites into Baptist funeral processes without compromising the Baptist faith.

In view of the above argument, the thesis questions the plausibility of an Urhobo Baptist remaining an Urhobo, functioning as a Baptist convert and expressing free cultural identity when celebrating the funeral of a departed relation. The thesis therefore queries the relevance of DSBC funeral policy in the light of the dichotomy it introduces into the context of Urhobo cultural rites during burial ceremonies. Although the data analysed in this thesis shows that there is significant growth in conversion to the Baptist faith, leading to growth of membership and churches in Urhobo Land, it has been discovered that this does not completely remove Urhobo funeral practices. A careful examination of Urhobo burial tradition also reveals that certain functions that Urhobo funeral rites are meant to serve do not contradict the Baptist faith. The reconciliation of the Urhobo

cultural context and Baptist position on funeral has however been difficult because of the contrasting contexts and differing views of the two traditions.

On the one hand, the Urhobo context is a 'web' in which the socio-economic, psycho-religious, geo-political and cultural strings are interlocked. Urhobo traditional religions play a determinant role in the formation of that web; leading to concepts such as devotion to ancestors and family solidarity. Devotion to ancestors strengthens Urhobo sense of history, identity, filial duty, solidarity, security and continuity among the living; and between the living and the dead. It also reinforces the society stability and harmony as the Urhobo look unto their ancestors as impartial law enforcement agents. To them, proper burial guarantees rest and bequeaths the status of ancestor on the deceased. It also gives emotional healing, spiritual satisfaction and cultural fulfilment to the bereaved. If it is not done, the children are seen as irresponsible and the family is ostracised in the community.

On the other hand, the DSBC and NBC belong to 'a Reformation heritage,' known for 'being sympathetic to renewal or restitutionist movements.'¹⁰³³ They emphasise breaking away from traditional cults to avoid spiritual compromise. They perceive Urhobo devotion to ancestors and other funeral practices as ancestor worship and worship of the dead which are 'pagan' and irreconcilable with Baptist faith and practices. They further believe that burial ceremony does not contribute to the eternal destiny of the dead and not done to the dead since the dead is ignorant of what is done and cannot acknowledge nor appreciate the efforts of the living. They reject naming churches after the dead and changed those formerly so named.

¹⁰³³ Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study*, 713.

The differing understanding described above makes reconciliation of their positions a difficult task. While one may perceive the possibility of constructing a contextualised Urhobo Baptist funeral liturgy, it is however a huge task which is much more than what this study could achieve.¹⁰³⁴ Nonetheless, since Urhobo Land is being evangelised by the DSBC/NBC, the position in this study is that it is not proper to ignore the conflicting features. Rather, it is inevitable to navigate a meaningful course. Having related the NBC funeral liturgy with *uruemu r'eshio r'Urhobo* ('Urhobo burial tradition'), this thesis perceives the necessity of an integrated programme of funeral rites that is culturally relevant to the Urhobo and contextually viable for Christological and evangelistic motifs of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. My argument therefore is that the integration of certain vital aspects of Urhobo funeral rites such as *evwe ehun* meal, *oghwa eghorie*, the breaking of *evwere* and the use of a full maize cob as a symbol of full life into the Baptist funeral process is possible, valuable and advantageous. If done, the Urhobo Baptists who hitherto boycott the church to perform certain family traditions that the NBC forbid during funerals will learn to trust the church which had taken efforts to understand them. Therefore, it could discourage dual funeral faith practices among Urhobo Baptists, meet the DSBC concern for undivided loyalty from its members, and lead to gain more converts among the Urhobo who had been lethargic of converting to the Baptist faith. If the Nigerian Baptist Convention could embark on this kind of venture in other areas of its ministry in Urhobo Land, it will be able to adequately contextualize its mission and be at home among the Urhobo. This process amounts to planting Baptist faith in the Urhobo cultural soil and thereby expecting indigenous Urhobo Baptist fruit.

¹⁰³⁴ The ideas presented in sections 10.2.1–10.2.6 are not to be understood as prescriptive but suggestive of reconciling Urhobo cultural contexts with the Baptist faith and practices.

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Appendix 1: Table of Participants

No	Gender	Age	Sub-cultural unit	Social status, occupation	Religion/denomination	Date of interview
1	M	61	Idjerhe	Palace chief, farmer	Urhobo traditional religion	3, 19 and 29 May 2009
2	M	81	Idjerhe	Non-chief, Trader	Christianity/Baptist	4 August 2009
3	M	71	Idjerhe	Retired reverend	Christianity/Baptist	17 August 2009
4	M	58	Idjerhe	Non-chief, businessman	Christianity/Baptist	28 August 2009
5	M	56	Idjerhe	Non-chief, civil servant-judiciary	Christianity/Baptist	21, 26 November 2009; 7 November 2010. 7 January and 29 July 2011.
6	F	80	Mosogar/Idjerhe	Non-chief, farmer	Christianity/Baptist	23, August 2009
7	M	72	Okpe	Chief, trader	Christianity/Baptist	7 August 2009
8	M	99	Oghara	High chief	Christianity/Baptist	24 April 2009
9	M	84	Oghara	Palace chief		9 June 2009
10	M	87	Agbon	Chief	Christianity/Redeemed Christian Church	14 August 2009
11	F	77	Agbon	Non-chief	Christianity/Baptist	22 August 2009
12	M	72	Agbon	Pastor	Christianity/Baptist	26 July 2009
13	M	65	Olomu	Non-chief	Christianity/Gospel Faith Mission	12 August 2009
14	M	66	Olomu	Deacon	Christianity/Baptist	28 August 2009
15–17	Fs	79, 46, 43	Abraka	Non-chief, trader, civil servant, university lecturer	Christianity/Baptist	22 August 2009
18	M	57	Abraka	Non-chief, university lecturer	Christianity/Baptist	7 November 2010
19	M	67	Ogor	Non-chief, retired university lecturer	Christianity/Anglican	22 August 2009
20	M	70	Orogun	Non-chief,	Urhobo traditional	16 August 2009

					religion	
21	M	68	Agbarho	Chief, educationist	Christianity/Baptist	30 August 2009
22	M	65	Agbarho	Chief, retired prison officer	Urhobo traditional religion	30 August 2009
23	M	73	Agbarhator	Chief, businessman	Christianity/Baptist	18 May 2008
24	M	60	Ughelli	Pastor	Christianity/Pentecostal	
25	M	64	Ughievwen	Politician, retired government officer, also academician	Christianity/Roman Catholic	17 February 2010
26	M	56	Isoko/Kwale, neighbouring ethnic groups	Priest	Christianity/Roman Catholic	19 March 2011

Appendix 2: Glossary of Urhobo Words in the Research, Expressions of Names and Attributes of the Supreme Being and some Urhobo Proverbs and Sayings

1.	<i>abiba</i>	mat
2.	<i>abere</i>	native steel fan
3.	<i>abo woroworo</i>	a praise name for a chief, meaning, ‘a wealthy person with generous heart and open hands,’ same as <i>abo sasasa</i>
4.	<i>abo sasasa</i>	same as <i>abo woroworo</i>
5.	<i>adane-Okpe</i>	a masquerade festival in Okpe, focusing on their four founding ancestors
6.	<i>adene</i>	four-road junction
7.	<i>aderha</i>	a cross road or a three-road junction
8.	<i>adiogwardakuje</i>	a praise name for a chief, meaning, ‘capable person’
9.	<i>adje</i>	a woman, see also <i>aye</i>
10.	<i>adjudju</i>	native fan
11.	<i>agada</i>	space between the two tighs
12.	<i>agbadabruru</i>	God is a mighty basin that fills everywhere
13.	<i>agbagba</i>	cross
14.	<i>Agbarha Otor</i>	an Urhobo subculture
15.	<i>Agbarha-ame</i>	an Urhobo subculture
16.	<i>Agbarho</i>	an Urhobo subculture
17.	<i>agberen</i>	ritual burial, ancestor’s installation, Uvwie version of Okpe and Idjerhe <i>agharha</i> performed in <i>erhuerhe</i> , used interchangeably with <i>erhuerhe</i>
18.	<i>aghwa rode</i>	thick or evil forest
19.	<i>aghwoghwo</i>	announcement
20.	<i>Agbon</i>	an Urhobo subculture
21.	<i>Aka</i>	ancient Bini town in Benin Kingdom, the present Edo State
22.	<i>akewemeke</i>	‘returned gesture’ as in ceremonial greeting rites
23.	<i>akomu</i>	ancestors stick/club or ancestor shrine, Agbon-Urhobo version of <i>opho</i> or <i>evwo</i>
24.	<i>akpevwe</i>	thanksgiving

25.	<i>akpo</i>	life or earth
26.	<i>akpoḃasa-a</i>	world has no end
27.	<i>akpo me yovwire</i>	my life is now good
28.	<i>akpo r'awaren</i>	olden times
29.	<i>akpo re ma rhe re na, eki ma re cho, oṛo cho nu ko kpo, ko kpo</i>	song: this world we have come to, we have come to trade, anyone who finishes goes home, goes home
30.	<i>akpo r'oba</i>	the era of Oba of Bini
31.	<i>akpo r'okenana</i>	modern times
32.	<i>akpo r'oyinbo</i>	European times
33.	<i>ame</i>	water, see also, <i>ami</i>
34.	<i>ami</i>	water, see also <i>ame</i>
35.	<i>amwá</i>	cloth
36.	<i>ararepha</i>	name of a god in Ewreni-Urhobo
37.	<i>Arhavwarien</i>	an Urhobo subculture
38.	<i>arho</i>	life
39.	<i>arho ro vb'oba-a</i>	eternal life
40.	<i>atiekpe nunu</i>	food sacrifice to the dead, opening the mouth of the dead, or removing sand from the mouth of the dead
41.	<i>avuakporaye</i>	each person has his/her own life or destiny
42.	<i>Avwraka</i>	an Urhobo subculture
43.	<i>aye</i>	a woman, see also <i>adje</i>
44.	<i>aye r'ekru</i>	family wife
45.	<i>ayuku</i>	wife of inheritance
46.	<i>aziza</i>	Forest spirit or god, also known as <i>okrobovowovo</i> meaning, 'the beast with one hand and one leg missing.'
47.	<i>Baibol Ofuafon na</i>	the Holy Bible
48.	<i>banga</i>	palm oil soup
49.	<i>bri-hwo rię ęvwe ehun?</i>	how many people do eat waist goat?

50.	<i>digwe</i>	to bow
51.	<i>ebrovwiotor</i>	interment
52.	<i>ebruba</i>	blessed, blessing
53.	<i>ebuine</i>	choristers
54.	<i>echekpa</i>	name of a god in Evwreni-Urhobo
55.	<i>efe</i>	wealth
56.	<i>efeludu</i>	velvetine, damask clothes, same as <i>efenudu</i>
57.	<i>efenudu</i>	same as <i>efeludu</i>
58.	<i>egburu</i>	big wrapper or six yards single wrapper tied by Urhobo men
59.	<i>eghweya</i>	family women, see also <i>emetẹ-uvwevwin</i> or <i>emetuvwevwin</i>
60.	<i>Eghwu</i>	an Urhobo subculture
61.	<i>egodo</i>	family compound
62.	<i>ego</i>	in-laws (plura of <i>ogọ</i>)
63.	<i>ekene</i>	an important festival in <i>Agbarha Otor</i>
64.	<i>eki-eruo</i>	Bridal procession (lit. 'market entry')
65.	<i>ekpe</i>	senior chief or the most senior chief, also called <i>nọkwa</i>
66.	<i>ekpeti</i>	box
67.	<i>ekpe udu</i>	rite of throwing sand to the chest of the deceased
68.	<i>ekru</i>	extended family
69.	<i>ekru-otor</i>	lineage of the earth, or subculture, similar meaning with <i>ekpotọ</i>
70.	<i>ema</i>	the chiefly traditional dance
71.	<i>emakashe</i>	angels
72.	<i>emetẹ-uvwevwin</i>	family daughters/women <i>emetẹ</i> and <i>emetẹ</i> can be used interchangeably, see also <i>emetuvwevwin</i> or <i>eghweya</i>
73.	<i>emetuvwevwin</i>	same as <i>emetẹ-uvwevwin</i> and <i>eghweya</i>
74.	<i>emẹşẹ</i>	children from same father
75.	<i>emo</i>	children

76.	<i>emrun ezaze</i>	something strictly forbidden, a taboo in Okpe-Urhobo
77.	<i>emuo rio ve idi eda</i>	eating and drinking, refreshment
78.	<i>emwuo phiyo ęga</i>	call to worship
79.	<i>erhi</i>	soul/spirit
80.	<i>erhierhi-r'osuosuo</i>	wandering spirits
81.	<i>erivwi</i>	the dead
82.	<i>erivwin</i>	Heaven/spiritual abode of the ancestors. The use of <i>erivwin</i> is multidimensional. It could also mean 'a place beyond the earth,' 'the abode of the gods,' or 'purgatory.' It is sometimes used interchangeably with <i>urhoro</i> , <i>odjuvwu</i> . The <i>erivwin</i> is used with other Urhobo words as compound-words. Then it points more to the ancestral abode of the different category of cluster living. See Examples below.
83.	<i>erivwin r'ekuoto</i>	Spiritual abode for the entire Urhobo subculture
84.	<i>erivwin r'orere</i>	spiritual abode for Urhobo village, town or community
85.	<i>erivwin r'orua</i>	spiritual abode for an extended family
86.	<i>erivwin r'uduwo</i>	spiritual abode for a village quarter
87.	<i>erivwin r'uvwevwi</i>	spiritual abode for a household
88.	<i>erivwi ri emu nu re, ihwo akpo sa ri emu re</i>	the dead has eaten, the living can now feast
89.	<i>eriyen</i>	so, also, likewise
90.	<i>erue emu k'ohwo k'arie</i>	one should be appreciative of kindness
91.	<i>esakpegodi</i>	fourth or fifth generation celebration, also called <i>sakpregodi</i>
92.	<i>esho</i>	burial, interment
93.	<i>esia amwan'ędjo, ędjo k'ubrurhe</i>	if you remove the cloth from the <i>ędjo</i> , it becomes a mere piece of wood
94.	<i>etine</i>	here
95.	<i>evu</i>	inside
96.	<i>evughe</i>	recognition
97.	<i>evwie ovie ga</i>	you born a king to serve him
98.	<i>Evwreni</i>	an Urhobo clan

99.	<i>ẹdjokpa</i>	palm-produce shrine, also called <i>ẹdjo ro 'kpa</i>
100.	<i>ẹdjo-oto</i>	earth shrine, also called <i>ẹdjo ro 'to</i>
101.	<i>ẹdjo re 'nu</i>	atmosphere spirits
102.	<i>ẹdjo ro 'kpa</i>	oil palm spirits
103.	<i>ẹdjo ro 'to</i>	land/earth spirits
104.	<i>ẹdjo</i>	gods
105.	<i>ẹdjo raghwa</i>	forest spirits
106.	<i>ẹdjo rame</i>	water spirits
107.	<i>ẹdjo rerivwin</i>	unidentified spiritual beings
108.	<i>ẹdjuvwię</i>	name of a 'warrior founder' god in Uvwię-Urhobo
109.	<i>ęga</i>	worship
110.	<i>ęgago</i>	worship or adoration
111.	<i>ęga r'akpewę</i>	thanksgiving service
112.	<i>ęga re ebrophiotor vwe esushi na</i>	interment service at the grave site
113.	<i>ęga ręhworhefua</i>	sanctification service
114.	<i>ęgar'orivwi</i>	funeral service
115.	<i>ęga r'orivwi vwevu ruvwevwi r'ęga na</i>	funeral service in the house of worship (meaning, in the church)
116.	<i>ęgan</i>	childlessness
117.	<i>ęghwię ra fio 'rivwi</i>	funeral outing
118.	<i>ęgwan</i>	family halls (plural of <i>ogwan</i>)
119.	<i>ęghor</i>	entertainment
120.	<i>ęghwa rode</i>	big forest or thick or evil forest
121.	<i>ęghwo ghwo</i>	termites
122.	<i>ęhworhefua</i>	sanctification
123.	<i>ękakuro</i>	chiefs (singular, <i>okakuro</i>), same as <i>ilorogun</i>
124.	<i>ękpako</i>	family elders
125.	<i>ękpotọ</i>	Urhobo sub-cultural unit (clan, kingdom, polities, and other terms are also used).

126.	<i>ẹlọhọ</i>	softness
127.	<i>ẹmarhen</i>	mashed yam
128.	<i>ẹmetẹ-yanvwo</i>	excision of <i>ubiekọ</i> ‘clitoris’ or girls’ circumcision, <i>ẹmetẹ</i> and <i>emetẹ</i> can be used interchangeably
129.	<i>ẹpha</i>	brides (plural of <i>ọpha</i>)
130.	<i>ẹphọ</i>	ancestors sticks/clubs or ancestors shrines (plural of <i>ọphọ</i>)
131.	<i>Ẹphron</i>	an Urhobo subculture
132.	<i>ẹreyọ</i>	acceptance
133.	<i>ẹreyọ rẹ obo re riariẹ ohwo vwiyo vwọ fẹ otọ rẹ obo re vwiare</i>	taking things around a person to explain things that happen (to explain an event contextually)
134.	<i>ẹrhovbo</i>	prayer, same as <i>ẹrhovwo</i>
135.	<i>ẹrhovwo</i>	prayer same as <i>ẹrhovbo</i>
136.	<i>ẹrhuerhẹ</i>	ritual burial, installation into ancestorship, also called <i>ẹrhuerhẹ r’orivwin</i> or <i>agberen</i>
137.	<i>ẹrhuerhẹ r’orivwin</i>	rite of installation as ancestor/ancestress, also called <i>ẹrhuerhẹ</i>
138.	<i>Ẹsereta</i>	Scripture reading
139.	<i>Ẹserophe</i>	Grace or Benediction
140.	<i>ẹsẹ</i>	fathers (plural of <i>ọsẹ</i> , ‘father’)
141.	<i>ẹsẹmọ</i>	male ancestors
142.	<i>ẹshe</i>	ancestors’ shrines, also called <i>ẹphọ</i> (plural <i>oshe</i>)
143.	<i>ẹvwe aghwara</i>	goat for the little hut built for the dead
144.	<i>ẹvwe ahọ</i>	bathing/cleansing sacrificial goat in Abraka-Urhobo, also called <i>ẹvwe asodahọ</i> in Idjerhe-Urhobo and <i>ẹvwe uluhu</i> in Olomu-Urhobo
145.	<i>ẹvwe asodahọ</i>	same as <i>ẹvwe ahọ</i> or <i>ẹvwe uluhu</i>
146.	<i>ẹvwe ehun</i>	literally waist goat: ‘waist’ in this context is equivalent to ‘loins’ referring to the fertility aspect of the sacrifice, also called <i>ẹvwe ewun</i> or <i>ẹvwe re ehun</i>
147.	<i>ẹvwe ewun</i>	same as <i>ẹvwe ehun</i> or <i>ẹvwe re ehun</i>
148.	<i>ẹvwe igbudu</i>	casket or mock coffin sacrificial goat in Orogun-Urhobo, also called <i>ẹvwe okọ</i> in Orogun and Idjerhe-Urhobo or <i>ẹvwe r’orhuerhẹ</i> in Olomu-Urhobo

149.	<i>ẹvwe 'kwa kwa</i>	sacrificial goat for material possessions
150.	<i>ẹvwe miobo</i>	salutary goats
151.	<i>ẹvwe oko</i>	same as <i>ẹvwe igbudu</i> or <i>ẹvwe oko</i>
152.	<i>ẹvwe okpo</i>	goat for serving community ancestors
153.	<i>ẹvwe re ehun</i>	same as <i>ẹvwe ehun</i> or <i>ẹvwe ewun</i>
154.	<i>ẹvwe r'ekru</i>	family goat
155.	<i>ẹvwe re tuvwevwin</i>	goat sacrifice for reaching home
156.	<i>ẹvwe r'inu</i>	cleansing goat
157.	<i>ẹvwe r'orhuerhe</i>	same as <i>ẹvwe igbudu</i> or <i>ẹvwe oko</i>
158.	<i>ẹvwe ru rhoro</i>	gate sacrificial goat to enter the spirit world
159.	<i>ẹvwe siobo uvwevwi</i>	goat for burial concluding ceremony
160.	<i>ẹvwe uluhu</i>	same as <i>ẹvwe ahọ</i> or <i>ẹvwe asodahọ</i>
161.	<i>ẹvwe ẹ</i>	traditional dish
162.	<i>ẹvwo</i>	same as <i>ẹpho</i>
163.	<i>frendo, omọ me</i>	rise up, my child
164.	<i>ghwuru</i>	died
165.	<i>ibuerime</i>	deities
166.	<i>Idjerhe</i>	The name of a person, the founder of Idjerhe town and clan. Also the name of an Urhobo clan. The pronunciation is corrupted as 'Jesse' by the colonialists. There is no god called Idjerhe as is with Urhiapele
167.	<i>igbe</i>	a popular indigenous religious sect among the Urhobo
168.	<i>igho</i>	money
169.	<i>igho-ugberarhe</i>	one of the prices paid during marriage for warming the bride's mother's waist or for her lying by fire when she born the bride
170.	<i>ighwre</i>	seven
171.	<i>ihurhe</i>	ancestor's figure, ancestor's shrine
172.	<i>ihurhe-oni</i>	ancestor's shrine for a mother
173.	<i>ihurhe-ose</i>	ancestor's shrine for a father

174.	<i>ihwo</i>	people
175.	<i>ihwohwo</i>	music bands
176.	<i>ihwo ri tu ushi</i>	the people who dug the grave
177.	<i>ihwrahwrahwra</i>	the roving/unsettled spirits
178.	<i>Ijesu Kristi</i>	Jesus Christ
179.	<i>ikelike</i>	stilts dancing
180.	<i>ikpotọ</i>	subcultural units, plural of <i>ẹkpoto</i>
181.	<i>ikuegbe</i>	testimonies
182.	<i>ikuesiri</i>	Good News, God's Message or Exhortation
183.	<i>ikurusu</i>	canon or dane gun for ceremonial shooting
184.	<i>ilorogun</i>	chiefs, plural of <i>olorogun</i>
185.	<i>imidaka</i>	cassava
186.	<i>imuẹro</i>	assurance
187.	<i>ine</i>	songs (plural of <i>une</i>)
188.	<i>ine orivwi ighwre</i>	seven funeral songs
189.	<i>ini</i>	mothers (plural of <i>oni</i>)
190.	<i>iniemọ</i>	female ancestors
191.	<i>iniọvo</i>	children from same mother
192.	<i>iphri</i>	image of aggression, also called <i>ivbri</i> or <i>ivwri</i>
193.	<i>irerhe</i>	priests (plural of <i>orerhe</i>)
194.	<i>irhuẹn</i>	bull or native cow
195.	<i>irimin</i>	ancestors in Okpe-Urhobo
196.	<i>irosio</i>	where rain drops
197.	<i>iruo</i>	work
198.	<i>ivbri</i>	same as <i>iphri</i> or <i>ivwri</i>
199.	<i>ivhierohọ r'evrenuwu na, ra ruẹ arhọ ro vb'oba- a</i>	passage from death unto eternal life
200.	<i>ivwri</i>	same as <i>iphri</i> or <i>ivbri</i>

201.	<i>iye eḡo</i>	ancestors worship or serving the ancestors
202.	<i>iye remu</i>	ancestor worship with food
203.	<i>iye re ewwen</i>	ancestor worship with a goat, a she goat usually used
204.	<i>iye rudi</i>	ancestor worship with drink
205.	<i>izobo</i>	sacrifice
206.	<i>kejekeje,</i>	the rank of a chief in Idjerhe-Urhobo, who has taken all the titles of chieftaincy from <i>oṭoṭa</i> ('speaker') to <i>onotu</i> ('warrior') to <i>oḡakuro</i> ('chief') and to <i>ekpe</i> ('senior chief')
207.	<i>Kristi vrẹ re yeri kpenu</i>	Christ rose and ascended
208.	<i>merian merian</i>	a praise name for a chief, referring to his power as 'a judge'
209.	<i>mẹ v'oye erivwin ovo</i>	we both have a common ancestral spiritual abode
210.	<i>migwo</i>	I am on my knees
211.	<i>mimeyerayin</i>	I am just saluting them
212.	<i>miyeriJesu</i>	I salute Jesus
213.	<i>miyeruvwe</i>	I salute you
214.	<i>Mosogar</i>	presently the newest and the twenty third clan of Urhobo
215.	<i>mudiakẹ</i>	name for a 'born to die' child meaning 'stay' with your earthly parents
216.	<i>nene yere baba kẹvwe o</i>	grandma, greet grandpa for me o!
217.	<i>nọkwa</i>	same as <i>ekpe</i>
218.	<i>obeke</i>	the first Urhobo Primer
219.	<i>Oberode rotakpo vwo 'rhurhu/Obe Odeotakporhurhu</i>	the large plantain leaf enough to shelter the entire world
220.	<i>obo erivwi</i>	sheol, the abode of the spirits, ghost, a spirit, ancestral world
221.	<i>oborevwa</i>	things as they are
222.	<i>oboyi</i>	there, yonder, that way
223.	<i>obruche</i>	comfort
224.	<i>obuepha</i>	medicine man
225.	<i>odjuvwu</i>	heaven, atimes used interchangeably with <i>urhoro</i> or <i>erivwin</i>

226.	<i>oganozo</i>	'patching road,' Urhobo borrowed this word from Ukwane, a neighbouring ethnic group
227.	<i>oga ra kpe erivwin</i>	the realm of the dead
228.	<i>Oghara</i>	an Urhobo subculture
229.	<i>oghwo 'evwri</i>	oil soup, cherished by Urhobo
230.	<i>oghwuru</i>	died
231.	<i>oghwuokpo</i>	Urhobo mythic name for toad meaning, 'he who dies should go home,' short form of <i>oroghwuruokpo</i>
232.	<i>ogogoro</i>	native gin
233.	<i>Ogor</i>	an Urhobo subculture
234.	<i>oguediṅ</i>	the council of chiefs
235.	<i>ohon</i>	name of a god in Evwreni-Urhobo
236.	<i>ohworo</i>	string
237.	<i>ohwovotota otunyo</i>	the multitude hears when He speaks
238.	<i>ojaeriṅ</i>	suffering, see also <i>ṛdjadja r'uwu ri beḍe</i> 'suffering in eternal death/torment of death'
239.	<i>Oje</i>	the art pleasing the ancestors and driving away the evil spirits in opha rites
240.	<i>oji</i>	thief
241.	<i>Okere</i>	an Urhobo subculture
242.	<i>oke</i>	gift
243.	<i>okoriniṅvo</i>	friends of children from same mother
244.	<i>okṛ re rivwi</i>	casket, literarily a canoe, a boat, an ark, a wooden trough
245.	<i>okpa</i>	the traditional calico woven from home grown cotton
246.	<i>okparobo</i>	victorious
247.	<i>Okpe</i>	an Urhobo subculture
248.	<i>okpo oyibo</i>	a piece of white cloth, also used for burial
249.	<i>o kpo re</i>	he has gone home
250.	<i>o kporo re jega</i>	he has gone to unforbidden land
251.	<i>okunovu</i>	river goddess

252.	<i>olokun</i>	the goddess of the sea
253.	<i>Olomu</i>	an Urhobo subculture
254.	<i>olorogun</i>	a chief, singular of <i>ilorogun</i> , same as <i>okakuro</i>
255.	<i>olorogun r'ovie</i>	palace chief
256.	<i>Omanomohwo</i>	the Creator who creates or moulds a person
257.	<i>owe koko omavw̄erovw̄e</i>	social gathering
258.	<i>on̄ega</i>	family appointed chairman of a burial occasion, also called <i>on̄oj̄os̄o</i>
259.	<i>onidjo</i>	name of a god in Ughwerun-Urhobo
260.	<i>onotu</i>	warrior
261.	<i>onovughakp̄o</i>	who can fathom the mysteries of life?
262.	<i>ophio</i>	name of a god in Ughwerun-Urhobo
263.	<i>orerh̄e</i>	priest
264.	<i>orieda</i>	witch
265.	<i>orieda-aye</i>	female witch
266.	<i>orieda-eshare</i>	male witch
267.	<i>orivwi</i>	a dead body, corpse, carcass
268.	<i>orivwieshio</i>	funeral
269.	<i>orivwi re sho, eshon</i>	burial
270.	<i>orodje</i>	the title of Okp̄e-Urhobo king
271.	<i>oroghwuruokp̄o</i>	Urhobo mythic name for toad meaning, 'he who dies should go home,' long form of <i>oghwuokp̄o</i>
272.	<i>Orogun</i>	an Urhobo clan
273.	<i>Oromakp̄o</i>	the creator of the world
274.	<i>Orovwakp̄o</i>	the owner of the world
275.	<i>Orovwakp̄ovw̄e erivwi</i>	the owner of the living and ancestral world
276.	<i>Orovwara</i>	The Fearful One
277.	<i>Orovwori</i>	Lord
278.	<i>orua</i>	extended family

279.	<i>o ru gba</i>	done well
280.	<i>ose</i>	concubine
281.	<i>oseba-gba-aniku</i>	upper and lower wrappers, two pieces of cloth tied by Urhobo women
282.	<i>oshe</i>	ancestor's shrine, also called <i>opho</i>
283.	<i>osio</i>	rain
284.	<i>o sivwe</i>	he heals or saves
285.	<i>Osolobrugę</i>	Supreme Being in Okpe-Urhobo. God who blesses, the Father who blesses, also called <i>Osolobruwhe</i>
286.	<i>Osolobruwhe</i>	same as <i>Osolobrugę</i>
287.	<i>otarhe</i>	destiny, same as <i>urhiewe</i>
288.	<i>ota r'Oghęę</i>	word of God
289.	<i>otonvwen</i>	long life
290.	<i>otorekpo</i>	bag bottom
291.	<i>otor Urhobo</i>	Urhobo Land
292.	<i>otu</i>	many people, age group, multitude, crowd, companion, host
293.	<i>ovie</i>	king
294.	<i>ovie kp'ameę</i>	the king has gone to the river
295.	<i>o vverhe</i>	sleep, euphemism for sexual intercourse, or 'he has slept,' literally or symbolically referring to death
296.	<i>ovwovwo</i>	evening
297.	<i>ovwuvwe</i>	name of a 'warrior founder' god in Abraka-Urhobo
298.	<i>owe koko omavwęrovwe</i>	social gathering
299.	<i>owha</i>	cam lotion from cam wood
300.	<i>owian, iruo, iruiruo, ewiowian</i>	work, labour
301.	<i>oyiboredjo</i>	the white man of the gods
302.	<i>ozighe</i>	muderer
303.	<i>obe</i>	book
304.	<i>Obe r'erhovbo r'ihwo ejobi kugbe ine vbęhęę</i>	Urhobo Prayer and Hymn book

	<i>r'Urhobo</i>	
305.	<i>ọbẹvwẹn</i>	want or wretchedness
306.	<i>ọbẹvwẹ</i>	tiredness
307.	<i>ọdjadja r'uwu ri bẹde</i>	suffering in eternal death/torment of death, see also <i>ojaeriọ</i> 'suffering'
308.	<i>Ọghẹnẹ</i>	Supreme Being, God
309.	<i>Ọghẹnẹbrorhiẹ</i>	God is the Supreme Judge
310.	<i>Ọghẹnẹ gbo ogbo koro jushurhe evwo</i>	God fells trees (extremely huge ones) for the farmer who does not possess an axe
311.	<i>Ọghẹnẹkohwo</i>	God gives to a person
312.	<i>Ọghẹnẹkohwoya</i>	God grants safe journey
313.	<i>Ọghẹnẹmakpọ</i>	God created the earth
314.	<i>Ọghẹnẹmarho</i>	God is great
315.	<i>Ọghẹnẹmrudu</i>	God sees the heart
316.	<i>Ọghẹnẹochuko/ Ọghẹnẹochuko ro vwu vwe hwo</i>	God is the helper/God is the helper of the helpless
317.	<i>Ọghẹnẹ Ọserihweje</i>	God the father of all people
318.	<i>Ọghẹnẹ ria sa ra amẹ vwọ ru' ukokodia</i>	God alone knows water enters the coconut
319.	<i>Ọghẹnẹriode</i>	God knows tomorrow
320.	<i>Ọghẹnẹ-Uku</i>	God the Great One
321.	<i>Ọghẹnẹvwogaga</i>	God is all powerful
322.	<i>oghọ-emuo</i>	respect
323.	<i>oghwa ẹghoriẹ</i>	rolling of spiritual load
324.	<i>Ọghwoghwa</i>	an Urhobo historical figure, ancestor to <i>Ogọr</i> , <i>Agbarha Otọr</i> , <i>Ughelli</i> , and <i>Orogun</i>
325.	<i>ogọ</i>	in-law
326.	<i>ogwan</i>	family hall
327.	<i>ọkakuro</i>	chief, same as <i>olorogun</i> , (plura, <i>ẹkakuro</i>)
328.	<i>ọka-orho</i>	the most elderly person in the community
329.	<i>ọke</i>	time
330.	<i>Ọkparebẹ</i>	an Urhobo subculture

331.	<i>òkpako</i>	elder
332.	<i>òkpara-uku</i>	the eldest man
333.	<i>òmònose</i>	child of a concubine
334.	<i>òmòshare</i>	a boy
335.	<i>òmòshare r'òkpako</i>	first male child, eldest son
336.	<i>òmòtẹ</i>	a girl, (singular of <i>emetẹ</i> or <i>emetẹ</i> which be used interchangeably)
337.	<i>ònojòsò</i>	same as <i>onega</i>
338.	<i>òpha</i>	circumcision rite or 'a bride,' singular to <i>èpha</i>
339.	<i>òphò</i>	ancestors stick/club or ancestor shrine (singular of <i>èphò</i>), also called <i>òvwò</i> , singular of <i>èvwò</i>
340.	<i>òrahwa</i>	youths in Olomu-Urhobo
341.	<i>òrẹ</i>	festival
342.	<i>òrẹ-reravwin</i>	animal festival
343.	<i>òrẹ-riyerin</i>	fish festival
344.	<i>òrhan</i>	a personal god
345.	<i>òrhan</i>	witchcraft
346.	<i>òrhe</i>	white river bank chalk
347.	<i>òshare</i>	a man or husband
348.	<i>òtòta</i>	speaker
349.	<i>òviẹ</i>	slave
350.	<i>òvwò</i>	same as <i>òphò</i>
351.	<i>òwara</i>	eldest man of the family
352.	<i>òyavwe r'emetẹ</i>	the circumciser
353.	<i>òyanvwe òmòshare</i>	excision of foreskin, or male circumcision (singular)
354.	<i>òyanvwe òmòtẹ</i>	excision of clitoris, or female circumcision (singular)
355.	<i>phorhoma</i>	cleansing
356.	<i>rovwoma</i>	to rest, to relax
357.	<i>sakpregodi</i>	fourth or fifth generation celebration, also called <i>esakpegodi</i>

358.	<i>Sobo</i>	a derogatory term for Urhobo and Isoko meaning 'people for sacrifice'
359.	<i>to ba re/2x ibaba ruiruo r'oye to ba re/2x</i>	song: the end has come, the father has finished his work, the end has come
360.	<i>ubiekọ</i>	clitoris
361.	<i>ubrevwię</i>	last born, or last child
362.	<i>udi</i>	drink
363.	<i>udi aihọwwere</i>	drink for seeking a permission, same as <i>udi ugwhoro</i>
364.	<i>udi akpẹvwe</i>	appreciation drink
365.	<i>udi ugwhoro</i>	drink for seeking a permission, same as <i>udi aihọwwere</i>
366.	<i>udi uyere</i>	reporting drink
367.	<i>Udu</i>	an Urhobo subculture
368.	<i>udu</i>	family land
369.	<i>uduaka</i>	a quarter or sub unit of Idjerhe-Urhobo
370.	<i>udurhie</i>	a quarter or sub unit of Idjerhe-Urhobo
371.	<i>ugboma</i>	body
372.	<i>ugboborode</i>	a praise name for a chief, meaning, 'hard working person'
373.	<i>Ughelli</i>	an Urhobo subculture
374.	<i>ughe-oku</i>	river festival
375.	<i>ugherighe</i>	name of a god in Ughwerun-Urhobo
376.	<i>Ughięwęn</i>	an Urhobo subculture
377.	<i>ughworho</i>	eagle's feather
378.	<i>ughwu</i>	death
379.	<i>ughwubrusi</i>	death is a major event
380.	<i>ughwujakpo</i>	death is real in the world and is as close as one's breath
381.	<i>ughwujaro</i>	death is harsh, it is a bitter experience
382.	<i>ughwu re bẹde</i>	everlasting death
383.	<i>ughwuwobaa</i>	death has no end and cannot be restricted to one person or place
384.	<i>ugo afuree</i>	eagle is white all over—a wish for the attainment of the highest state of being

385.	<i>uje</i>	twenty
386.	<i>ujo</i>	cow tail, used as fan
387.	<i>ukodo rɛvwe</i>	goat meat pepper soup with yam and plantain
388.	<i>ukpe te, ke rue emu r'ukpe</i>	when the time comes, you do what is due
389.	<i>Uku</i>	refers to God's royalty, majesty and almightiness
390.	<i>Uku Oghara nami/3x wo su to</i>	the praise and salutation name/appellation of the king of Oghara-Urhobo, meaning, 'the wealth of Oghara like a river/3x may you will reign and live long'
391.	<i>umwemwu</i>	sin
392.	<i>une</i>	song
393.	<i>une orivwi</i>	funeral song
394.	<i>unuẹbo</i>	counting the number of children of the deceased
395.	<i>unugbedjo</i>	the mouthpiece of the gods
396.	<i>Urhiapele</i>	The name of a traditional god in Okpe clan of Urhobo Land. The town Sapele is named after this god. The town was originally and traditionally called Urhiakpele but later corrupted as Sapele by the colonialists. The calling of the town as Sapele is generally in use today, while the use of Urhiapele is limited to the god, whose shrine is located in the heart of the town till today.
397.	<i>urhievwe</i>	destiny, same as <i>otarhe</i>
398.	<i>Urhobo</i>	The name of the ethnic group. The name of their language also. The Urhobo people are situated in the north-western fringe of Nigeria's Niger Delta in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. A minority in the nation, but majority in the State. Divided into clans which are further subdivided into quarters
399.	<i>Urhobo ovo</i>	Urhobo is one
400.	<i>Urhobo</i>	refers to Urhobo people as a whole
401.	<i>urhoro</i>	eternal happiness, sometimes used interchangeably with <i>erivwin</i> or <i>odjuvwu</i>
402.	<i>urie robi vughe eterhe r'oye ko kpor</i>	a stream that forgets its source will get dried
403.	<i>uriofo</i>	ladies head ties

404.	<i>uruemu</i>	character, behaviour, custom
405.	<i>uruemu arovwon, odi erhuvwu</i>	it is character that one marries, not beauty
406.	<i>uruemu eruo hohe evu rasa radia</i>	activities done in reflection of the place lived
407.	<i>uruemu ohwo</i>	character makes a person
408.	<i>uruemu r'eshio r'Urhobo</i>	Urhobo burial tradition (short form)
409.	<i>uruemu r'orivwin r'eshio r'ihwo r'Urhobo</i>	Urhobo burial tradition (long form)
410.	<i>uruemu r'Idjerhe</i>	Idjerhe tradition
411.	<i>uruemu Urhobo</i>	Urhobo tradition
412.	<i>ururhoro</i>	porch way
413.	<i>ushi</i>	grave, tomb, sepulchre
414.	<i>usi</i>	starch (raw or prepared as food)
415.	<i>uvboroma vb'oma venwe</i>	peace of the body and the spirit/mind
416.	<i>uvwevwin</i>	house
417.	<i>Uvwie</i>	an Urhobo subculture
418.	<i>uvwromọ</i>	grand-children
419.	<i>Uwherun</i>	an Urhobo subculture
420.	<i>uwgoro</i>	permission
421.	<i>uyere</i>	greeting
422.	<i>uyere</i>	report
423.	<i>uyovwi-echio</i>	tradition of welcoming visitors
424.	<i>vwerhe</i>	to sleep, describing death as falling asleep
425.	<i>yanre</i>	come

Appendix 3: Table of Features of Urhobo *ikpotọ*

No	Subculture	h/quarters	Rituals	Leadership style	Source of authority	Date of creation
1	Agbarha Otor Meaning Agbarha-hinterland	Agbarha Otor	ekene-every 20yrs., ore/eha-reravwin ('animal festival') ore/eha-riyeri ('fish festival')	king-hereditary (primogeniture- eldest son of the reigning king) ¹⁰³⁵	Initially Benin, ¹⁰³⁶ now localised	15th-17th century
2	Agbarho Meaning Together and be great ¹⁰³⁷	Orho-Agbarho	<i>Yibi</i> festival of the community ¹⁰³⁸	Republicanism-the most senior chief is installed as the head, the <i>Osuivie</i> ¹⁰³⁹ ('leader of kings') of the sub-cultural unit		about 1266 in the 13th century ¹⁰⁴⁰
3	Agbassa	Agbassa-Warri				
4	Agbon	Otorho-Agbon/Isio kolo	<i>Isiokolo</i> shrine, <i>Olokun</i>	Started with <i>Okarorho</i> ('the eldest man') but now having a king-restoration of Monarchy to be rotated among the six sub-units		
5	Arhavwarien	Arhavwarien				

¹⁰³⁵ S. U. Eriwo, 'Idjerhe,' in *The Urhobo People*, 56.

¹⁰³⁶ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰³⁷ Hubbard, *The Sobo of the Niger Delta*, 274–275. Hubbard used the word 'Agbado' instead of 'Agbarho.'

¹⁰³⁸ Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 55. The entire table draws heavily from the materials presented in Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms*, 30–133.

¹⁰³⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid.

6	Avwraka	Otorho-Abraka	<i>Otor, Adakaji</i> shrines and annual festivals	practiced gerontocracy for so long but has recently adopted a monarchical system		around 1370, 14th century
7	Ephron	Effuruntor	<i>Imowe/EjUv</i> <i>wie</i> , water god and a protective deity, <i>Ohworhu</i> festival (Aug./Sep.), <i>Edjo re Ephrun</i> (March/April), and <i>Obiekpo</i> (April/June)	Republicanism- leadership is by the office of <i>Orovworere</i> which can be occupied by only <i>Otota</i> who had been only by election or unanimous selection of the sub-culture traditional officials ¹⁰⁴¹		
8	Evwreni Meaning <i>erue oni'</i> (‘they see elephant’) ¹⁰⁴²	Evwreni	has Ararevwa (crocodile) as totem	king-restoration of Monarchy		
9	Eghwu	Ewu			Ogoibiri, Ijọ	
10	Idjerhe Meaning Road	Otorho-Idjerhe	(1.) <i>Ughe-oku</i> festival for Okunovu, every February. (2.) <i>Ore</i> and <i>Iyeri</i> ¹⁰⁴³ harvest and feasting festival every August	started ruling by the <i>edion</i> society (‘council of elders and chiefs’) but adopted monarchical system in 1955 to rotate between 2	localised	Early 15th century

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁴² Ibid., 79.

¹⁰⁴³ Erivwo, ‘Idjerhe,’ 60.

				ruling houses; Onovwo and Erhiekwę ¹⁰⁴⁴		
11	Mosogar	Mosogar		king		2006, 21st century
12	Oghara	Oghara-efe	<i>Oku</i> festival in honour of Olokun, <i>Iyeri</i> or harvest festival every December, <i>Omafuvwe Eweya</i> shrine for fertility, <i>Okpowhorhu</i> festival, <i>Ekene</i> festival every 20yrs.	king-restoration of Monarchy		
13	Ogor	Otogor	<i>Ohworhu</i> every 20yrs., <i>Iyeri/Orer'iyę</i> annually	king-primogeniture	initially from Benin, now localised	15th century
14	Okere-Urhobo	Otor-Orere, Okere				
15	Okparebe	Okparebe	worship of <i>Okpokpotu</i> and <i>Okara</i> deities	king-primogeniture		15th-16th century
16	Okpe	Ororokpe	Adane-Okpe Masquerade festival every three years to worship the four princely ancestors	king-restoration of Monarchy, between 4 ruling houses; Orhue, Orhoro, Ewreke and		

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid., 59.

				Esezi		
17	Olomu	Otorere-Olomu/Otorolomu	also has Ararevwa (crocodile) as totem, but connected to Ophrirho the deity of Akperhe	king-restoration of Monarchy		15th century
18	Orogun	Orogun	Has the Ogorigbo ('monitor lizard') as totem and ẹrosẹ as god	Gerontocracy -ruled by <i>Okpara-Uku</i> ('the most eldest man') from four ruling houses of Olise, Opia, Araode and Echi of <i>Umusu</i> , the most senior of the Orogun's five quarters		about 1675, 17th century
19	Udu	Otor-Udu				
20	Ughelli	Otovwodo-Ughele	has the Orhua ('antelope/Deer') as totem. Has <i>Ore-Otete</i> and <i>Ore-Ode</i> festivals mainly for feasting, festivities and to renew their patriotism	king-primogeniture	appointed internally but confirmed from Benin, ¹⁰⁴⁵ or Tarakiri, Ijọ, now localised	17 th century
21	Ughiewwen	Otu-Ughiewwen (Jẹrẹmi)		Republicanism- leadership is by the office of	Ogoibiri, Ijọ	

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid., 58.

				<i>Okobaro</i> which can be occupied by only <i>Otota</i> which is rotated among four ruling kindred in the order of seniority ¹⁰⁴⁶		
22	Uvwię	Uvwię/Effurun	Edjuvwię	king-restoration of Monarchy		
23	Uwherun	Uwherun town	<i>Onidjo</i> deity, <i>Ade</i> wrestling festival, New yam/Harvest festival	Republicanism-led by the most senior <i>Odion</i> from Erovie which is the senior of the subculture quarters (controversial because the other four quarters are excluded from leading the whole sub-cultural unit as expected under the republican system) ¹⁰⁴⁷		

¹⁰⁴⁶ Adjara and Omokri, eds. *Urhobo Kingdoms: Political and Social Systems*, 61.

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

Appendix 4: The Text of the NBC Burial Policy

This text box is where the unabridged thesis included the following third party copyrighted material;

‘Burial Policy,’ *Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention*. Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nig.) Limited, 2005, 1–5.