



## Religio-Philosophical Implication of Death and Funeral Rites among the Nyakpa People of Karu Local Government Area in Nasarawa State

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### Abstract

The weight of Mbiti's philosophical assertion that; "Africans are notoriously religious better defines the African man and cannot be overruled. Religion and Philosophy are interwoven and constitute essential aspects of every human society. The importance of religion, as well as Philosophy in the society, cannot be over-emphasized. In Africa, while almost all the activities that are carried out from birth to death are predicated on their Philosophy and religion, such religious practices are carried out based on the strength of rational and philosophical articulations and the religious worldview of the people. This translates to the fact that, while, in matters of religious practice and faith, there are no questions, African philosophy stands in here to critically analyze and give reasons why it is good for us to practice our religion and point at the consequence of objecting to it. It correctly captured the logicity of the religious beliefs of African people as everything in Africa is done according to religious beliefs, African man carries his religion to farms, markets, government houses, war, meetings, etc. All the events and ceremonies in Africa are done according to their religious beliefs. This paper attempts to articulate the way and manner in which the Nyankpa people in Karu Local Government Area also attach importance to and practice their religion in all aspects of their cultural living and how Religion and philosophy play vital roles concerning the death and funeral rites of the people. The paper concludes and provides recommendations arising from the findings of the research.

**Keywords:** Religion, Death, Implication, Philosophy, Funeral Rites

### Introduction

Religion is said to be an essential aspect of every human society and the importance of religion in the society cannot be over-emphasized. In many African societies, while almost all the activities that are carried out from birth to death are predicated on religion, such religious practices are carried out based on the strength of rational and philosophical articulations. It, therefore, tells that while in matters of religion and religious practice there are no questions because faith is at the center, Philosophy stands in to critically analyze and give reasons why it is good for us to be religious and the consequence of objecting to that. One would be tempted to say that without religion, the possibility of societal survival is not there since the activities of individuals in the society are regulated based on religion and religious values and the agents of religion. The statement above gives credence to Mbiti's assertion that; "Africans are notoriously religious, and each people have their own religious system with sets of beliefs and practices, and religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully, that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it"<sup>1</sup>. Some centuries ago, Theology was regarded itself as the "queen of all sciences", until later on when great philosophical



thinkers and scientific discoveries began to prove religion wrong. Galileo upturned the assertions by religious teachers who thought that the sun rises from the east and sets in the west contrary to the philosophical discovery that the sun is static while the earth is spherical and rotates in its orbit and axis to give us day and night as well as the dry and wet seasons respectively. Many of the issues in religion have been explained using philosophy.

Mbiti correctly captures the logicity of the religious beliefs of African people when he said everything in Africa is done according to religious beliefs, African man carries his religion to farm, market, government house, war, meetings, etc. All the events and ceremonies in Africa are done according to their religious beliefs. Rites of passage in Africa, from birth to death are also performed based on the religious beliefs of each tribe. Like other African settings, the Nyankpa people also attach importance to religion in all aspects of their lives. Religion also plays a vital role in carrying out the death and funeral rites of the people.

The task of this paper is to examine the religious implications of death and funeral rites among the Nyankpa people as well as to ascertain the rationale behind performing such rites in the society. Defining the religious benefits? What are the socio-economic benefits? The paper draws conclusion and provides recommendations arising from the findings of the research.

### **Brief Historical Review of the Origin of the Nyankpa People**

According to oral tradition, the first Nyankpa man on earth originated from a cave in a mountain or hill called 'Darigo' and named the hill after him. Darigo today formed part of the boundary between Kaduna and Nasarawa State along the Keffi – Kaduna road and it is near or adjacent to a village called 'Darigo Maibiri'(Kusang). Darigo and his wife, Obiche had several children among who were Ovurgbe, Otat, Onuck (all males) and Oching (a female). Each of these children had their children who later grew up to become a clan. For example, in Nyankpa land, we have different clannish groups, such as the Ovurgbe clan, the Otat clan, and the Onuck clan. Ochin married from another ethnic group called Ozho, who live in the forest of the hill near the present Kwoi town in Kaduna State. She had many children who according to other sources constitute the present Kagoma and Eggon ethnic groups who are believed to be part of the descendants.

### ***The Geographical Location and Population of the Nyankpa People***

Nyankpa people reside in the western part of Nasarawa state, the central area of Nigeria. Nyankpa homeland lies between the parallel 7.40 and 8.4 of latitude and 8.5 and 9.22 of longitude. Its area is at a rough estimate of 430 square miles supporting 10,268 inhabitants with an average of 23.89 persons per square mile. The population is unevenly distributed, over 724 persons live in Bagaji; the remaining Nyankpa natives are scattered along the foothills from Gitata in the south to Ago in the north and Kare in the northwest. Large settlements also exists in the northeast section of the plain such as far as Jaja and Dutsen Gogo.<sup>3</sup>

Like other African societies, Nyankpa people believe that death has no friend and it has no mercy on anyone; one cannot dodge it, bribe it, or run away to avoid it. Death visits every community, family and everyone. They also see death as a road that everybody must follow or a natural call that everybody must answer. Since death concerns everybody and it causes permanent separation in this physical world, this makes Nyankpa people to respect death and funeral rites more than any other rite of passage. Death used to bring all the relatives of the deceased together not only to mourn and say goodbye to the deceased person but to also remind themselves that they are also mortal and one day they would follow him. But Nyankpa people also believe that death is just a



separation from the relatives in this physical world to the spirits world. Death, therefore, is a passage or a transition from this earth to hereafter<sup>4</sup>.

Nyankpa people have two types of deaths: bad and good death. Those who died a bad death as a result of divine punishment by *ofuh-leng* 'thunder', falling from a palm tree, locust beans tree, die in labor and those who die of sickness such as chicken pox, smallpox, measles, epilepsy, etc. are not to be accepted in the abode of the living dead. They would become wondering spirits; they cannot live in their grave because Nyankpa people believe that God would burn the grave of the wicked ones. Those people who die a good death, such as die at old age, having good character, dying a natural death and leaving children behind, they would be given a befitting burial to install them in the ancestral world.

### **The Segments of Funeral Rites among the Nyankpa People**

**The First Segment** is when a person is dead among Nyankpa people all the kinsmen and kinswomen will be duly informed and they will converge at the deceased's house and be crying and sympathizing with the deceased's family grave digger which are specially represented by each family in the community start their own work, while digging the grave, 2 or 3 people from the deceased's family would be sent to go and fetch water within the family's clan's land for the bathing of the corpse. The place they used to fetch the water for the bathing of the corpse is a very important ritual place that every family or clan has its own and nobody is allowed to fetch this type of water from another family's or clan's place and this place doesn't dry no matter how long the dry season is.

When digging the grave is completed, the members of the grave site called "Abewabebe" would inform the relatives of the deceased officially that, the grave is completed; therefore, the corpse should be bathed and dressed. After all these, one of the deceased relatives would blow the flute called "tapyere" and they drum around the corpse three times inside the attachment room called "Onkongwa". They would still come out of the "Onkongwa" and blow the tapyere (flute). The deceased's enate kinsmen would call "*ateseni*" and would then follow with their flute called "*Atapyere*" – *Akpo*. They would blow two tunes inside the attachment room<sup>5</sup>. In the course of preparation for the burial, a virgin girl or an old woman that has stopped seeing her menstruation would be asked to pound corn into flour and the corn flour would be diluted and given to the corpse. At the grave site, a string of a shrub is tied to the corpse's left thumb in the course of preparing for the burial. The shrub will be tied to a small grass stick inside one small pot called "Okpei" which was put on top of the grave where the head of the deceased lies. The oldest person in the family would then come out with cock, in the case of a male who dies while the hen in the case of a female together with a solution of a concoction called "*Enghart*". He would deep his forefinger in the solution of the concoction and rob all the joints of the corpse from the head to the toes. This would be done three times, while the cock would be swung over the corpse muttering safe arrival into the ancestral world. The corpse would now be wrapped in a mat inside black wrapper and the corpse will be buried by the two strong men beside which is dug by a group of specialists, a grave is vertically oval to a depth of three feet and six feet horizontally rectangular. It is worthy of note that only adult males however go to graveyard. The children, non-initiated adults and women are not to go close to the graveyard.<sup>6</sup> The oldest man in the house would also come out with the same concoction he used at the family entrance. The small flute (etom) will be also blown thrice and the dead man's spirit would answer. The dead body will be now laid to rest on a side position with one cheek resting on the right palm if is a male, and on the left, if is a female. The grave will be covered



with a large spherical stone. The grave is dug in the pit like form. The string of the fresh shrub that was tied on the deceased thumb will be tied on the stick outside the grave. Red soil dug is used in sealing the grave, and a small pot called “*okpei*” is erected on the soil at the head of the corpse. Then the stick that the string of shrub was tied to will be inserted in the soil that was molded in the pot. The grave digger will be given a He-goat to be killed for cleansing and other rituals and the meat would only be eaten by the members of the graveyard. After the burial rite, the deceased’s wife or wives or even some relatives would shave their hair and leaves of palm trees will be waved as a rope and tied on the heads of the wife or wives and the relatives would tie on their hands and their movement will be restricted for six months after the six months the rope be loosed.<sup>7</sup>

**The second segment** is the last and the most important ceremony given to the deceased, Nyankpa people believe that the first funeral rite is to bury the deceased’ corpse physically and after this burial, the spirit of the deceased is still lingering and restricted within the family’s ancestral shrine. During this time the family of the deceased would not sleep in a day without food in their house because it is believing that the spirit of the deceased would come around and eat, nobody is allowed to pour hot water on the ground without giving a warning to the deceased’s spirit. It is during this second funeral rite that the deceased soul will be buried spiritually and also admitted to the public ancestral shrine or the deceased’s spirit will be taken to the shrine to become a masquerade.

There is no fixed interval between the first funeral rite and the second funeral rite, this depends on when they are financially ready to carry out the second funeral rite. Some even borrow money to carry out this important ceremony because it is a shameful thing for children not to fulfill this final responsibility, and the deceased’s spirit would surely haunt his children if they refused to perform this funeral rite. There are also some qualities that a deceased person needs to possess before giving this befitting funeral rite in Nyankpa land, some of these qualities are: one must die at an advanced age, children and average age people are not entitled to the second burial rite., one must die a natural death, those who died as a result of divine punishment or died in sickness such as leprosy, smallpox, chicken pox, heretic, measles, etc would not be given the second funeral rite, one must have been a person of good conduct while alive. Witches/wizards, sorcerers, and poisoners are not regarded for the second funeral rite. A person whose spirit haunted human beings with an evil and selfish aim will not be given this funeral rite. The second burial rite is only for people that live an exemplary life. Lastly, one must have able children or relatives to carry out the task of the second funeral rite. Four goats are needed for the rite if it is a man and five for a woman. Therefore, one must have left able sons or relatives to carry out this tedious task. One goat for the mother’s relations “*ateseni*”, one for the death “*Ebo Akpo*”, and one for the attachment room “*Ebo onkongwa*”, the other one will be slaughtered for other guests that attended the feast.

The second burial rite is normally carried out between the months of April and May. In the preceding month, locally brewed beer “*Adeck*” will be produced by the initiator. This “*Adeck*” is to tell the village chief and his subjects including other traditional office key holders in the village that so- and so person’s second burial rites will be performed this year. The chief of the village would now relay the news to his subjects there. This kind of meeting is normally held under a big tree. Nyankpa people’s second funeral rites are done in accordance with the first funeral rites. Just like the first rite when kinsmen would assemble to bury the deceased and converge again after four days, so also it is the second funeral rite. All the deceased’s kinsperson would gather at the entrance of the deceased to entertain all in attendance with “*aleng*”- dance and songs. If the deceased is a man, he will be taken to his grave but if it is a woman, her parents would carry her along with them to their hometown. The dead person will shower blessings on the living as he goes to the world beyond. Different dancing groups will showcase different dances. The mother’s relations “*Ayichi*” would



bring cooked food some raw ones either rice “*Echem*” with plenty of meat. The initiator will buy a mat for the mother’s relations to sit on that day. They do come with money to give the celebrants that carry out the tasks<sup>8</sup>

During this second funeral rite, Nyankpa people have an important event called “*Efoh-Ogbo*” climbing of thatched roof in a competitive mood. After the climbing competition, a bunch of leaves is inserted on top of the roof thatch by the first climber. At about 6:00 pm that day, the image of the corpse is prepared in the family entrance and taken out in a crowded and dancing mood to the grave to be buried.<sup>9</sup> At the burial “*Ebit-Okum*”, Nyankpa people have traditional food called “*Etoe*” which all the kinspersons would wait behind to take together with the family members. They prepare the soup with bitter leaves and the food with hungry rice (*Echem*).

### **Religious Implication of Deaths and Funeral Rites among the Nyankpa People**

As has been stated earlier concerning the religious commitment of African people, among the Nyankpa people, religion takes the center stage in all community activities. In the aspect of deaths and burials, only those who died in old age, natural death, have able children behind and most importantly those who behave well when they were still alive are given befitting burials, Nyankpa people believe that those who died young is a painful death and the wicked people are always the victims of divine punishment and also the victim of unclean disease such as leprosy, epilepsy, smallpox, chicken pox, measles, etc. These types of people are not qualified for befitting burial, and therefore they will not become ancestors. It is also important to note that during the first burial rite, songs are sung to point out the characters of the deceased and ask people to emulate him and also to condemn witches that caused the death. Through these songs, people are reminded that they are mortal, and everybody should behave well, so that one day when they die, they would be received by their ancestors in the ancestral world. These songs are help to inculcate morality in the life of people in the society.

The roles that ancestors play in society cannot be over exaggerated, the living deaths serve as custodians or guardians of the traditions, customs, norms and values, the living deaths play dual role in the Nyankpa social set up, they bless those who honour them and those who keep the taboos, traditions, customs, norms and values of the family and community, but those who behave contrary are punished by them, for people to avoid the rag of the ancestors, they try their possible best to behave well by keeping the taboos, traditions, norms and values of the society, by doing this, it helps to promote the well being of the people in the community and also keep the society orderly and intact.<sup>10</sup> During the treatment of the corpse, the person that will pound the corn flour that will be given to the corpse which serves as the last food he will take on earth and give him the strength to start his journey to the ancestral world, must be a virgin, or a woman that has stopped seeing her menstruation and even those that will fetch water for the bathing of the corpse must be people with clean characters and must be a virgin or a woman that has stopped seeing her menstruation. The gravedigger that use to be appointed from each family to represent their family in grave digging must be people with reputable characters, the witches, adulterers and people with questionable characters are not allowed to go close to the grave. The above points mean that the deaths have become spiritual beings and nothing unholy or unclean should be associated with them. This directly or indirectly preaches that the death abhors unclean people and anybody that want to associate himself with them should behave well in the society.

When burying the corpse, the string of a shrub is tied on the left thumb of the deceased and it will be inserted in the small clay pot outside of the grave, where the head of the deceased lies in



the grave. This serves as a link between the ancestral world and the living world if the ancestors want to bless their living family, they would come through the string of the shrub that is, the string of the shrub serves as a route for the ancestors. The death spirit can also come through the string of the shrub to haunt those who caused his death. Nyankpa people believe that immediately a person is dead, he becomes invisible to the naked eye, and people would not be able to see him again only the deceased can see the people in this living world, and the deceased person possesses more power immediately after his death, so he can use his power to bless his loving ones, curse, haunt or take revenge on those who caused his death, in line with the above statement Awolalu and Dopamu said that:

Since the ancestors are no longer visible in the physical sense, some element of enhanced power is attributed to them. Death has given them more potentialities, and prestige. They possess considerable power both for good and evil. Sickness and misfortune of every kind can be attributed to the influence of those offended among them. They can influence rainfall or bring good harvest, they can provoke prosperity or cause adversity, they can also give protection and general well-being or cause disruption or calamity.<sup>11</sup>

This points to the fact that the dead who have become ancestors possess the power to bless their loved ones or to revenge on those who cause their death which at times it will lead to the death of those witches, sorcerers, or poisoners, that killed him, if these things happen, it will bring peace in the family or community because the incident will serve as a warning to those witches who have the intention of doing the same thing or killing innocent people. During the second burial, the spirit of the dead person will be taken to the public shrine to become a masquerade in which he would no longer be restricted to the family shrine, his role has been extended to the community, and he will now come out as a masquerade to watch over the people in the community and to also discipline the wrongdoers he will guide all the rituals place such as local fish ponds, streams and economic trees such as palm trees, locust bean trees, mango, etc. and ensure judicious use of these things for the well-being of the community. This masquerade often comes with messages from the ancestral world to the living family. The message could be a blessing to the community or instruction on how to behave and take care of the community natural endowment or to show or tell the community the displeasure of the ancestors and how they can avert the punishment of the ancestors. They believe in the power of the ancestors and this masquerade help in keeping the community orderly and intact.<sup>12</sup>

The rituals are carried out by Nyankpa people in every event in the land geared towards honouring and venerating their ancestors which make Nyankpa people have confidence in whatever they do believe that with their ancestor behind them, they are safe. These rituals are needed to cleanse and render people blameless so anybody who wants to partake in these rituals must shun or desist from doing evil in society.<sup>13</sup> The living dead serve as mediators between the earthly family and “Odyonfanh”, the Supreme Being or divinities. The living dead communicates with the living family through dreams. As the senior members of the family, the ancestors communicate to Supreme Being and divinities on behalf of the living family, they plead on behalf of the family if anything went wrong between the divinities and the living family, they also plead with the Supreme Being or deities to bless the living family. The Implication can be divided into the following segments:

There are a lot of negative implications for the people of Nyankpa, but this depends on the type of death and the burial given to the person or it also depends on the individual’s character when he was alive. If a wicked person dies, at times, his spirit would come back in the form of a lizard in



the house to kill the family members after a few days of his death that is why if a person dies, most especially a nefarious witch or wizard, diviners would be consulted to know whether he still has evil intention after his death. If it is discovered that the dead person has evil intentions for the family, the herbalist would be called to come and catch the spirit of the person a few days after his death in the form of a lizard and it would be killed and buried. Some dead wicked witches' ghosts would go and hang on the junction of the road around mid-noon or in the night to haunt for people to kill, which makes people to stop moving around alone in the mid-noon and sleep in time in the night during the death of a wicked witch so that they would not become a victim of this ghost. In this condition, the village head would call the elder of each family to discuss how they would ward off this evil in the village. At times an herbalist would be called to give the whole village a protective herb so that they would not be harmed by the ghost or the herbalist would perform some rituals to pursue the spirit of the dead person away. These types of people would not be given a befitting burial even if they die in old age, leaving children behind. Etc. Those deaths who possess the qualities of befitting burial and were not given the befitting burial that were entitled to, their spirit would come in the form of a whirlwind to give the family a sound warning or to remind the family in case they have forgotten, at times this wind used to cause a lot of damages on their houses by removing the roof or cause damage on their farm crops, if the family notice this, they would look for a means to give the deceased person a second burial. During this time, the deceased person would be asked to forgive the family for their negligence or failure to carry out the second befitting burial. But if the family refuses deliberately, the deceased spirit would continue to disturb the family.

Like other African societies, Nyankpa people are expected to venerate their living dead (ancestors) all the time. They visit the ancestral shrine to pour them bit of food and wine, from time to time. The ancestors are regarded as the senior members of the family and they are the custodians or guardians of the society, traditions, taboos and rules and regulations, any family that refuses to venerate or observed the taboos, traditions, customs, and rules and regulations of the family or society the ancestors would warn or punish them through crops failure, infertility, untimely death, disfavor in time of marriage. Quarcoopome added that; during their early days, it was their duty to promote domestic peace and wellbeing of the community, to distribute favors, to exercise discipline or enforce penalties, and to be guardians of family ethics to prevent anything that might cause disruption. Thus the ancestors are factors of cohesion in African societies.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the living dead would bless the family if they venerate them and follow the taboos, traditions and customs of the land. The researcher has mentioned above that religion is infused in all aspects of human life, and this is no exception with the death and funeral rite of Nyankpa people, in fact, funeral rites is even one of the religious aspects that accompanied the soul of the deceased person to the ancestral world. The researchers mentioned in chapter three that the grave diggers are representatives from each family within the village, only those that are initiated in the shrine or cult of "*Ofuh-leng*" before a person would be appointed to represent his family as a member of grave digger. After being appointed as a member of the grave digger, the person would be initiated into the group of the grave diggers before he would be allowed to carry out his functions, it is also interesting to know that, women and non-initiated men are not allowed to go close to the graveyard, so, the burial and purification exercise are done by the religious specialist according to the religious beliefs of Nyankpa people.

Bathing and treating the corpse of kings and "Wailam" chief farmers are done exclusively by religious specialists. When "Wailam" dies the corpse would immediately taken out of the house to the graveyard to prevent women and the non-initiated men from seeing it, the bathing will be done by the co-title holders with some medicinal herbs and after performing some rituals, he would



be buried with all his traditional cloths, staff, “Efut” hat, while a king would also be buried immediately after his death without announcing it and they also bury king with his royal cloths, crown, staff, etc. all these things are guided and are done by the traditional religious instructions of the Nyankpa people.

During the second burial rite, Nyankpa people have traditional food that is normally prepared by a religious specialist, this food is called “Etoe”, this food is very little, it does not even full a plate but this food will feed all the deceased’s relations and they would even have some left over. The deceased relations would gather together to take this food and during this time the deceased relations would be asked to desist from wrongdoings as they would ask God through their ancestors to bless the family and the other relations. Efunu noted that;

That there is a kind of offering, he who refuses to eat the “etoe” shows that he knows something about the deceased’s death because the “Etoe” is a sign of “ewot” which means oath-taking. There is a prayer that the occasion would be free from any trouble. There is also an appeal to the deceased’s soul to bless the living. In all these, they keep on re-emphasizing the name “Odyong-Afang”, Odyong-Afang yikabi” meaning “God help us<sup>16</sup>.

As Efunu mentioned above, the food serves as oath-taking, anybody who knows about the death and forces himself to take this food would die instantly or a few days after taking the food. During the second burial rite, Nyankpa people have what is called “Ogbo” as it was mentioned in chapter three (3). This is another import of religion to the funeral rite of the Nyankpa people because only old men have been initiated into the “Ofuh-leng” shrine that they honor with this important event during their funeral rites. Those old men that have not been initiated and women are not honored with this event in their funeral rites and only the newly initiated youth are allowed to climb this “Ogbo” or participate in this occasion. It is also important to know that during this event, they hunt for game, this serves as a part of the assistance that religious men render to the deceased’s family to carry out the full funeral rites. During this event, the climbers also showcase their magical powers, because one can be the fastest runner and reach at the foot of the roof (Ogbo) before others but if he is not magically equipped would not be able to climb the roof. This also serves as a method of entertaining and consoling the deceased’s family and the sympathizers. After climbing the roof, the deceased’s spirit would be prepared for the second burial rites, because it is believed that the first burial rite is to install the deceased’s soul into the family ancestral world and the family ancestors would receive him but the spirit is functioning within the family waiting for the day that he would be taken to the public shrine.

In the second burial rite, the deceased’s soul would be taken by the religious men and guided by the family ancestors to the public shrine in which the deceased’s spirit will bury itself in the shrine, and from that moment henceforth, it can come by itself to become masquerade. The whole community would now recognize him as a public ancestor but that does not mean that it is no longer an ancestor in his family, as a spiritual being it can move from one place to another at any time. So, his family would still honor him as an ancestor while the community would also honor him as a public ancestor. This second burial rite is carried out by the religion of Nyankpa people. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that, the function that religion plays in the life of Nyankpa people cannot be over-emphasized. In fact, religion regulates all the affairs of Nyankpa people from birth to death.





### **Philosophical Implications of Death and Funeral Rites among the Nyankpa People**

**Positive Implications:** One of the qualities of giving a befitting burial to a dead person is that the person must have able children that can give him a befitting burial after his death and to continue honour or venerating him in the ancestral shrine. This makes Nyankpa people to try their possible best to marry wife or wives in order to get children that will give them befitting burials and venerate them after they die and the ancestors play their own part by blessing the family with children in order to have people who would continue to venerate them fuller said:

The ancestors also need to have the family, clan and tribe preserved so that they will not be forgotten. Therefore, they use their powers to give children, good crops, health and protection to their people. The ancestors come back to the family through new children who are born.<sup>14</sup>

The philosophical implication of this is that giving birth to children it will lead to a growing number of people in the family and it will also lead to the expansion of the community at large. When a person dies in Nyankpa land his corpse will be buried in the family or clan's burial ground because every clan has its own burial ground in its land and nobody is allowed to be buried in another person's graveyard. The water for the bathing of the corpse is also fetched in the special stream or river within the family or clan land, and only the family members are allowed to go there to fetch water, and only water for bathing of the corpse is allowed to fetch there. These places are good ritual places in Nyankpa land because they helped to indicate the land ownership within Nyankpa land.

In the second funeral rite which the soul of the deceased would be buried spiritually in the public shrine which becomes a masquerade and also as a public figure in the community is full of celebrations. This second burial start with wake-keep night, in this night, many songs are sung and people dances throughout the night, masquerades always come as representatives of the ancestors from the ancestral world to entertain people with a different kind of traditional dance. In this ceremony, the deceased kinsmen would come with different group dancers for example, the climbing of 'Ogbo' roof that the young initiates climb at the entrance of the deceased in a competitive mood to entertain people, showcase their magical power and also show people that the deceased person was a strong man or a warrior when he was alive. In this ceremony people socialize and learn from one another as they interact together, is also an avenue for enjoyment as people wining and dine together and it helps in binding the society together.

Nyankpa people believe that masquerades are dead people or ancestors' representatives that used to come out from the ancestral world from time to time to bless them, to initiate the young ones into adulthood, and to perform other functions as discipline the offenders. This initiation is one of the prominent occasions in Nyankpa land that helps in training the youngster in different aspects of life. For instance, the youngster will be trained on sex education or how to relate with the opposite sex, how to farm, fish, and climb and also tell them the taboos, traditions, norms, history and customs of Nyankpa's people. In this initiation ceremony, the relations of the initiates would come and jubilate with one another. This initiation by the living dead or masquerade helps in social stratification because immediately when a person has been initiated into this cult, he will be separated from women and uninitiated men, he has become a man.

**Negative Implications:** Death in Nyankpa land has a lot of negative philosophical implications. When a person dies, people would mourn for him by crying and wailing in order to express how



much they miss the man in this physical world and his contribution to the family and society at large. The person that dies may be a breadwinner of his family or maybe a prominent person in the society. This used to cause more pain than a person that did not have any responsibility or did not contribute positively to the family or society. At times if a person who contributed a lot to the family and society dies, people would look down on that family or the society, because a person in the family or society can command respect or fear for himself, his family and society at large. At times it used to be very difficult for the family to find somebody to replace the dead person or to carry out the functions that he left behind. It would also be difficult for the family to revive from psychological trauma, because of the shock of some people's death, some people become mad, faint, and some even die because of the death of relations.

If a person dies in Nyankpa land, people around used to help the family of the deceased person in many ways, people cook food for the family, they help the deceased relations by fetching water, cooking, and giving raw food. The family also spends a lot of money in carrying out the burial rites, domestic animals like cock, and goat are slaughtered for the burial rite. Some even borrow money in carrying out the traditional burial rite.

This explains why Efunu noted that;

One must have able children or relatives to carry out the task of second burial rite. Four goats were needed for the rite if it were a man and five for a woman. Therefore, one must have left able sons or relatives to carry out these tedious tasks. One goat for "ateseni", one for "Ebo-akpo". One was for "Ebo-onkongwa", the other one will be slaughtered for the feast.<sup>15</sup>

This type of expenditure could shake the economic or financial muscle of the children or relations of the deceased but they have no option but to carry out the burial like that in order to avert the punishment of the ancestor. In Nyankpa land, corpses are buried with some items, such as clothes, weapons, money, animals and even human beings, these items are buried with the corpse so that the dead person would use them on his way to the ancestral world and the items also serve as gifts to the ancestors in the spirit world that is if a person is not given a befitting burial with these items he would not be received in the world or the land of the ancestors. This adds more pain to the deceased's family or relation because these items would have been used for the development of the family. The Nyankpa traditional burial rite used to take about 4 days before they would finish the burial rites, this was waste of time because instead of people finishing the burial rite within a day so that the children and relations of the deceased would continue with their normal business but they restrict themselves from the movement for four days, this also use to bring set back to the deceased family more food would be consumed on the sympathizer and the relations.

Closely related to the above point, if a person dies in Nyankpa land the widow's head will be shaved and palm tree leaves would be weaved and tie on her head for 6 months, during this time, she would not be allowed to travel or go to the market or sleep somewhere else other than her husband's house. During this period, the deceased's family would observe her to know whether she carries the deceased's pregnancy, if she has the deceased's pregnancy, she would not be allowed to remarry or be free until she delivers. If the deceased's wife is a business woman, she would not be able to travel from one market to another or she would not be able to go to the market for her business within this period. This can cause a lot of damage to her business, and she may lose her customers, at times this may lead to the end of the business or it will cause a financial crunch in her life and the life of the children.



The funeral rite is therefore, compulsory for those that qualify for it, and Nyankpa people believe that death always comes unexpectedly, at times, it will come at the time that the deceased's children or relations are not having money or financially ready to carry out the funeral rites; if there is nobody to borrow them the money to carry out the burial rite, they have to endure the rag of the deceased's spirit because the spirit of the dead is lingering around the house after the death waiting for the children and relations to install him to the ancestral world through burial rites. If the family is not able to give him a befitting funeral rite, the dead spirit would come and cause a lot of troubles such as infertility, failure in harvest, and lack of peace in the family which can also lead to the death of some members of the family.

**Implications of Funeral Rites:** As in other African societies, Nyankpa people believe in communal life, anything that happens to one of them, happens to all, and they share their burdens, sorrow and happiness together, this also points to the fact that man is a social being, he cannot live in isolation, people live together to have mutual back-scratching, that is why Mbiti said that; "I am, because we are, we are therefore I am".<sup>17</sup> The communal and the mutual back-scratching of Nyankpa people also reflect in the way they carry out their death and funeral rites, since death is inevitable and it has no respect for anyone, family, clan and community, it chooses to visit anyone or family at any time it wants, Nyankpa people see the need of coming together to help the family that death visited regardless of the social or financial status of the person or family. If a person dies, the children, family and relations of the deceased would be under confusion, worried and sorrowful that they may not be able to do anything on their own. The neighboring family would be the one to do the domestic activities and other work related to the death on that day. The neighboring families would be the one to look for an errand boy on behalf of the family to inform all the relations of the deceased concerning the death, it is at this juncture that, the relations of the deceased and the other people would converge the entrance of the deceased's house.

At this point, the women that gather at the entrance will be singing while the men would be blowing flutes and be beating drums all together, in their singing they would point out the good characters of the deceased and praise him so that other people around would emulate him, on the other hand, they would condemn the bad characters of the deceased and ask people that have the same characters to desist from it. In their funeral songs (dirge), the singers would also remind the gathering that, everybody is a mortal being, that one-day inevitable phenomenon called death would visit him and a person's character would be one of the most important things "*Odyongfanh*" Supreme Being would require from him. These dirges from the relatives and neighboring families also serve as a means of pacifying and comforting the deceased's family and relations. It helps in uniting the community, promoting good characters and warding off evil in the community because people use to adhere to these instructions that come through songs.

When a person dies, people use to come from far and near to pay the deceased's family a condolence visit, some would leave their house for two to three days in other to sleep with the family of the deceased's, during this time they will pacify and comfort the deceases family and help them in cooking, fetching water and other domestic chores. Death occurs at a time that people don't expect and therefore most people don't prepare for it, when this happens to a particular family, each family in the village would bring money, and raw and cooked food to the deceased's family and each family would cook food in her house so that the strangers that would come for the burial rite would eat not necessary in the deceased's house alone. As soon as an old man dies among the Igbo, the death would be announced by loud cries (mourning the death) and booming of a gun. Sympathizer would begin to troop in from the neighboring towns and villages. The relatives and friends of the deceased



bring money and clothes. When he belongs to a cult, members of his cult play important roles in the burial. They dress the corpse and lay it in state<sup>18</sup>. Apart from this individual assistance, time would be spared for the congregation that gathered at the funeral rite to bring their own contributions, these contributions can be in the form of money, clothes, palm wine, raw food etc. these items would be given to the deceased's family to carry out the funeral rite. Out of these items, some would be buried with the corpse.

### **Conclusion**

The religion and Philosophy of the Nyankpa People are interrelated and constitute essential aspects of African society. Therefore, the role of religion and Philosophy in Nyankpa society cannot be neglected. While almost all the activities carried out from birth to death hang on the Philosophy and religion of the African people, such religious practices are carried out based on the strength of rational and philosophical articulations of the religious world view of the African people. This African philosophy gives reasons why it is good for us to practice our religion pointing at the consequence of objecting to it.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the numerous changes and Implications of Funeral Rites among the Nyankpa People that have taken place in Nyankpa People's death and burial rites as already discussed, the researchers came up with the following recommendations;

- i. Huge expenditures should be avoided. This is because, many times, the family of the deceased are expected to spend a lot of money in carrying out the burial rites alongside the killing of domestic animals like cock, goat to serve guests who came to the burial rites.
- ii. Efforts should be made to reduce the huge costs involving condolence gifts, the building of expensive graves, buying of costly coffins or caskets and the settling of mortuary bills by either sons-in-law or the deceased's relations.
- iii. The Nyankpa People should accommodate some of the concomitant traditional religious elements in the ritual rites and practices of death and burial, which are good but very often misperceived and undermined as paganism. Such good traditional values as are found to be of benefit to the Nyankpa traditionalists and modernity alike should be encouraged.
- iv. The Nyankpa extraction as a group of people with a unique identity should not allow their rich culture of death and burial rites to be adulterated, destroyed or wiped out by the winds of external pressures and influences like Christianity and Western Civilization.
- v. In spite of the fact that change is inevitable, the Nyankpa people should learn to retain some of their moral, social, and cultural values, which are for the common good of their society.
- vi. Sympathizers should be encouraged to make free-will donations to assist the bereaved widows, widowers and orphans in Nyankpa society.
- vii. Women and children should be allowed to participate actively in the funeral celebrations of their loved ones. This will help in solving the problem of gender differentiation and equality in contemporary Nyankpa society.
- viii. An African theology of death and burial should be introduced to re-educate Nyankpa people on the reality of death. This will eradicate the superstitious beliefs, fears and threats concerning death and burial rites in Nyankpa society.



- ix. Workshops, seminars, symposiums, and lectures should be organized to help Nyankpa traditionalists in Nyankpa society to re-think and re-discover the importance of the approach of modernity, and burial practices.
- x. A bill of right should be drawn to assist the bereaved family in sharing the deceased property and widows(s).
- xi. The state government, Nyankpa traditional council, the church, chiefs and elders, should make laws to forbid social activities like buying and selling during funeral celebrations in Nyankpa society.
- xii. The Adie Nyankpa and Nyankpa traditional council in collaboration with the Nasarawa State Government and the State Arts Council should re-educate the Nyankpa people on the effect of new innovations, especially in the areas of marriage, death and burial rites.

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