NOVEL AND ENTERTAINMENT IN FUNERAL ACTIVITIES AMONG THE YORUBA IN KISI TOWN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Among the Yoruba there is always interesting behavioural change in the way people go about the burial activities. Such behavioural change usually interchanges concurrently by reflecting love and respect for the dead on the one hand and dread and despair on the other hand. Along with this is the issue of festivities usually tagged as ‘befitting burial’ which they see as mandatory for positive repercussion on those left behind by the dead based on their belief that the dead have power over the living. While this seems very interesting, most of the studies on death and funeral in developing societies (of which Yorubaland in southwest Nigeria is inclusive) are mostly historical in nature and for complete appreciation of cultural heritage in traditional societies. This study, which took place in Kisi town, Oyo State, Nigeria is therefore transcending the regular studies on death and funeral which are limited to showcasing cultural heritage by looking at its touristic perspective. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to source for primary data from the residents of Kisi town. Questionnaire was adopted for quantitative and complemented with observation as a qualitative tool. A total of 100 respondents were sampled from the community and a copy of questionnaire was administered on each of them. The data collected were analysed and interpreted in frequency and simple percentage. The results showed that virtually all the respondents (99%) have either attended and/or witnessed funeral activities before. People participated in funeral activities because they served as avenues for social get-together (52%); channels for uniting with old friends (69%) and viable outlets for making new social contacts (49%). Some of the perceived benefits inherent in funeral activities included social bonding (30%), social control and moral readjustment (20%), spiritual stability (16%). Others saw the benefits as being in the forms of outlets for marketing goods and services (12%), avenue for leisure and recreation (22%). The novel aspects of funeral activities were intermittent crying and cracking of jokes when occasion demands; voluntary wailing and crying by the sympathizers; occasional hot disagreement over simple issue like sharing of food. At the point where the stage was already set for merriment, food and drinks flow easily while dancing became feverish and frenzied. At this stage it was always difficult to assume that people that were wailing and crying incessantly are those now wriggling their bodies to the rhythm of the music being supplied. Recommendations were also made in line with the findings of the study.
INTRODUCTION
In developing societies especially in Nigeria, there are several ways by which people observe their leisure. Most often leisure and recreation among the people take place in settings that are typically different from conventional sense. This explains why issues of leisure and recreations are studied through ecotourism, pro-poor tourism, recession tourism, medical tourism, educational tourism, creative tourism, dark tourism and doom tourism among others. In developing world, Nigeria specifically, observation of leisure and recreation usually takes place in places least expected. Typical in such case is the period of funeral activities; this is common among the Yoruba in Southwest Nigeria.

Death, although a dreaded event, is perceived as the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation. It is also seen as the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds (Labeodan, 2008). In African setting, which includes the Yoruba race, the goal of life is to become an ancestor after death hence the need for a ‘befitting’ funeral, supported by a number of religious ceremonies for every person who dies. The belief is that when this is not done the dead person may become a wandering ghost, unable to ‘live’ properly after death and therefore a danger to those who remain alive. Befitting burial rites therefore becomes a guarantee of protection for the living than to secure a safe passage for the dying (Pillari and Newsome, 1998).

As part of ‘befitting’ burial rites, many Africans have a custom of removing a dead body through a hole in the wall of a house, and not through the door. The reason for this seems to be that this will make it difficult (or even impossible) for the dead person to remember the way back to the living, as the hole in the wall is immediately closed. Sometimes the corpse is removed feet first, symbolically pointing away from the former place of residence. A zigzag path may be taken to the burial site, or thorns strewn along the way, or a barrier erected at the grave itself because the dead are also believed to strengthen the living (Douglas, 2005, Parrinder, 1962 and Mbiti, 1977). Many other peoples take special pains to ensure that the dead are easily able to return to their homes, and some people are even buried under or next to their homes.

Aside from this is the issue of ceremony and other festivities that usually accompanied the final burial of the dead. The ceremonies are always novel and entertaining in their peculiar ways depending on the age and the social status of the dead as well as the social standing of the ‘mourners’. In spite of this, existing literature on tourism are always conventional in nature and most often western world inclined. Meanwhile, tourism in developing world is assuming dimensions that quite differ from what obtains from industrialized societies. Though most of these issues are hardly noted in tourism studies, but due to the reasonable number of domestic tourists being attracted by these activities, they are qualified to be tagged as tourism activities. Typical in such case is the naming ceremonies, ‘house warming’ ceremony and funeral ceremony. Funeral ceremony which is interchangeably referred to as funeral activities therefore formed the main concern of this study.

Among the Yoruba (which is the focus of this study) there is always interesting behavioural change in the way people go about the burial activities. In this case, such behavioural change usually exhibits fluctuation between love and respect on the one hand and dread and despair on the other based on the belief that the dead have power over the living.
While this seems very interesting, most of the studies on death and funeral (Freeman, 2005; Mbiti, 1991; Idowu, 1973) in developing societies (of which Yorubaland in southwest Nigeria is inclusive) are historical in nature. These works exist most especially for complete appreciation of cultural heritage in traditional societies.

With the limit of the existing works on death and funeral as endeavour meant to showcase cultural heritage rather than looking at its touristic perspective interesting issues like the essence of mourning and rejoicing simultaneously during funeral activities, innovations being adopted into this practice, the constraints being experienced in the course of this as well as perceived relevance of these activities in contemporary era remained unanswered. Efforts at finding response to the foregoing will therefore enhance better understanding of events and processes involved in funeral activities among the Yoruba in southwest Nigeria; bring about an appreciation of the novelty and entertainment inherent in these activities as well as demonstrate that leisure and recreation take place at the slightest opportunity in festive period like naming and burial ceremonies in African setting. It is in the light of this that the novelty and entertainment aspects of funeral activities among the Yoruba in Kisi town, the headquarters of Irepo Local Government of Oyo State, Nigeria becomes the main focus of this study. The finding from this study equally has capability of correcting the impression from the scholars who are western world-inclined that Africans have poor attitude to leisure and recreation. The overall manifestation is that research interest in tourism from African perspective should not be limited to conventional setting alone.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Sample size and Study Population:** A total of 100 respondents were sampled in order to get the needed data for the study. This population was involved in the administration of questionnaire. The size includes both the males and females who were residents of indigenous part of Kisi town. On the other hand, 6 respondents (that consisted of 2 representatives from each of the Christian, Islam and African Traditional Religions) took part in In-depth Interview.

**Research Instruments:** Data for this study therefore were collected through the use of questionnaire (Quantitative), the In-depth Interview and Observation of events during the ceremonies (Qualitative).

(a) **Questionnaire:** It consisted of two (2) sections. Section A was designed to tap demographic information from the respondents, while section B has issues pertaining to Funeral activities as its focus.

(b) **Interview Guides:** These contained relevant probing questions administered on religious leaders in the community. The leaders are those from Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. These people were included as the Key Informants because of their wealth of experience and central roles they are playing in the course of funeral activities.

(c) **Observation:** The techniques here included participant and non-participant observations.

**Sampling Technique:** The town was demarcated for the purpose of this study into the elite and indigenous zones. From the elite zone 5 streets were randomly sampled. The indigenous zone was divided according to the existing traditional quarters known as ‘Agboole’ among the
Yoruba. Out of these quarters, 15 were randomly sampled. In each of the streets sampled in the elite area, 5 buildings were taken through systematic sampling method. Random sampling method was adopted in picking 5 buildings from the traditional quarters sampled in the indigenous part of the town. At the end, a total of 100 buildings were sampled out of which a household was picked from each of the buildings for final participation. In picking eligible person for the survey from the sampled households, the head of the household was given priority. Where a head of household was absent, the wife was selected; where the household is polygamous, the most senior wife was considered. Willingness to take part in the study was used in picking replacement in households where the qualified persons refused to take part. The respondents for the In-depth Interview were purposively selected among the leaders of the three dominant religions (Christianity, Islam and Traditional) in the town; 2 respondents came from this category thus making 6 respondents altogether.

Data Analysis: In the course of this work, the data generated for the study after the administration of questionnaires will be analyzed making use of simple percentage to express the findings. Content analysis was employed for the in-depth Interviews and documented information from the observations. This involved direct extraction of information provided in the in-depth interviews and observation to support data from the questionnaires.

Scope of the Study: The scope of this study included the activities being engaged in during the funeral; this includes the pre and post-burial activities in Kisi town, Oyo State, Nigeria. The respondents were limited to the Yoruba speaking residents who have been living consistently in the town for the past five years.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
Issues discussed under this included the gender, age, education, marital status, religion and occupation.

![Gender Distribution](image1.png)

**Figure 1: Gender Distribution**

Source: Field Survey 2012

Data in figure 1 revealed that 62% of the respondents were males while the remaining 38% composed of female gender. This is a result of sampling technique used where preference was
given to the head of households who were mostly male gender due to patriarchal system of government operating in the study area.

![Figure 2: Age Category of the Respondents](image)

Source: Field Survey 2012

The above figure showed that 55% of the respondents were between the ages of 30 to 50 years; this was followed by those who were less than 30 years old (32%) and those who were above 50 years (13%).

![Figure 3. Educational Qualification of the Respondents](image)

Source: Field Survey 2012
The above data showed the level of education of the respondents. It was shown that majority of the respondents were second school certificate holders (37%). This was followed by those who had no formal education (25%), National Diploma/Nigeria Certificate of Education (20%), Primary School Leaving certificate (13%) and Higher National Diploma/University degree (5%).

Source: Field Survey 2012

Marital status of the study population was shown in figure 4. According to the data presented therein, 53% of the respondents were married, followed by the unmarried (34%), the widowed (10%) and the divorcees (3%).

Source: Field Survey 2012
Figure 5 showed religion affiliations of the respondents. It was revealed that the Muslims constituted the majority of the respondents. The Christians had 30%, while the worshippers of traditional religion constituted 10%.

Source: Field Survey 2012

Occupational status of the respondents was as displayed in figure 6; these included farming (21%), teaching (19%), students (11%), the artisans (4%), while the civil servants constituted the majority (32%).

NOVEL AND ENTERTAINMENT IN FUNERAL ACTIVITIES

PERCEPTION OF FUNERAL ACTIVITIES

Figure 7: Period of Involvement in Funeral Activities
Majority of the respondents (99%) have either attended and/or witnessed funeral activities before. The most recent involvement in or perception of funeral activities was 22 days (which was less than 1 month) to the time when this study was being conducted. Only 32% of the respondents were recorded here; 49% was involved in funeral activities between 2 and 5 months ago, while 19% got involved in funeral activities over 1 year ago.

The relationship of the deceased to the respondents was as follow: distant relations (11%), father (43%); mother (21%), colleagues in the office (12%), members of the church (5%), and members of an Islamic Organization (8%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funeral activities are necessary for eternal rest of the departed souls</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These activities are age-long traditions that must be respected</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These activities are the only channel through which the bereaved could show appreciation of what the dead have done when they were alive</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reasonability and capability of the bereaved is</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to table 1, people perceived funeral activities as necessities for eternal rest of the departed souls (65%). These activities were also recognized as age-long traditions that must be respected (72%), and the only channels through which the bereaved could show appreciation of what the dead have done when they were alive (81%). The reasonability and capability of the bereaved is known through the way funeral activities were packaged and executed (58%), they were the final send-forth activities that should be properly done as a mark of respect for the deceased (61%). Lastly, funeral activities were perceived as normal since all religions (Islam, Christianity and Traditional) were not against them (91%). The traditional religion priests that formed parts of the in-depth interview (IDI) argued that funeral rites were the needed ingredient for the dead to assumption a new status as ancestor. In the words of one of them:

Death is the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation (despite trauma and pains involved), the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. It is a journey towards becoming an ancestor; this is why every person who dies must be given a "correct" funeral, supported by a number of religious ceremonies. If this is not done, the dead person may become a wandering ghost, unable to "live" properly after death and therefore a danger to those who remain alive (IDI Male, Traditional Religion Priest, Atipa area, Kisi).

Table 2: Determinants of Participation in funeral activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funeral activities are avenues for social get-together</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activities are channels for uniting with old friends</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are viable outlets for making new social contacts</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral activities also provide the basis for sustaining and renewing friendship</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These activities assist in sustaining family bond</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through these activities previous good gestures were reciprocated</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam encourages patronage of funeral activities for moral reforms</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, 2012

The factors determining people involvement in funeral activities were as presented above. According to this table, people participated in funeral activities because they served as avenues for social get-together (52%); channels for uniting with old friends (69%) and viable outlets for making new social contacts (49%). Funeral activities also provided the basis for sustaining and...
renewing friendship (55%), assisting in sustaining family bond (68%); it was also perceived as
the opportunities for reciprocating previous good gestures (61%). In the opinion of others, they
participated in funeral activities in line with Islamic command, which saw it as avenue for moral
reforms (65%). An Islamic cleric provided insight into moral reformation function of funeral
activities thus:

Funeral activities mean opportunities for ‘fidau’ prayer for the dead among the
Muslims. The prayer further provides avenues for general sermon by the clerics
on the inevitability of death and the need to prepare for it. The essence of such
reminder about death is to encourage every individual on the necessity of constant
review of our activities for possible improvement or outright change of such
behaviour if rated abnormal through self-assessment. Regular occurrence of death
therefore means regularity of such sermons which will substantially influence the
moral fabric of everybody positive (IDI, Male Muslim Cleric, Oke Laha area,
Kisi).

Existence of benefits in people’s involvement in funeral activities was affirmed. Some of the
perceived benefits inherent in funeral activities included social bonding (30 %), social control
and moral readjustment (20 %). Others saw the benefits as being in the forms of outlets for
marketing goods and services (12 %), spiritual stability (16 %). The issue was further illustrated
by one of the participants in the In-depth Interview thus:

Funeral is a community affair with the church as one of the several players; while
the whole community feels the grief of the bereaved and shares in it, the churches
thus see to it that the bereaved make the transition back to normal life as smoothly
and as quickly as possible. This is done through ministration of words of God and
offering of prayers to the bereaved (IDI, Male Christian Clergy, Isale Odo area, Kisi).

**OBSERVATION SECTION**

*Common Events Packaged into Funeral Activities*

Data that are being presented here were gathered through observation of funeral events witnessed between February 2011 and August, 2012. For instance, common events that were packaged into funeral activities witnessed were divided into two. The first event consisted of events that took place at the earlier or preparatory stage of funeral activities. These are activities that took place immediately the deceased had been confirmed dead. The other stage was named final burial stage; these are the time when arrangements had been concluded on final rite of passage for the dead.

Among the *Muslims* and *Traditional worshippers*, the dead are usually buried within 24 hours of confirmation that an individual was dead. Only condition noted to make this contrary was when there are litigations over the circumstances surrounding such death. Example here was the case of an individual murdered. In another instance, if such a person was young and the immediate family members were not available to formally receive the corpse. In the case of the *Christians*, an individual is deposited at mortuary after death. Such corpse could be kept in the mortuary for up to one year depending on financial capabilities of the relatives of the dead person. Where such a person was relatively young, the corpse may spend lesser period of time. Where the circumstance surrounding the death had legal implications, the corpse may stay longer in the mortuary until when the case is finally disposed of.

While the final stage of funeral activities involved interment and social get-together for the Christians, it was only an occasion for social get-together for the Muslims and Traditional religion worshippers. Some of the common events noted during the funeral activities witnessed during the course of data collection for this study are hereunder listed.

**Preparatory/Earlier Stage**

- Convey the of corpse to mortuary (*Christians*)
- Placing of condolence register in front of the house (*Christians*)
- Prayer Packages (*Followers of all religions*)
- Packaging of the corpse including washing and other forms of dressing (*Muslims*)
- Purchasing of burial/wrapping cloth for the corpse (*Muslims*)
- Janazat (funeral) prayer (*Muslims*)
- Arrangement for coffin and interment (*Muslims and Traditional religion*)
- Non-elaborate entertainment for the visitors on condolence visits (*Muslims and Traditional religion followers*)
- Meeting for the deliberation on final burial date and related activities (*Followers of all religions*)

**Final Burial Stage**

- Arrangement for coffin (*Christians*)
- Preparation of food on the day preceding the final outing (*Followers of all religions*)
- Retrieval of corpse from mortuary (*Christians*)
• Early morning prayer (spiritual rites) on the final burial day (Followers of all religions)
• Preparation of the venue for the event (Followers of all religions)
• Arrangement for the entertainers (Musicians) [Followers of all religions]
• Side attractions like Pall-bearers/corpse carriers who dance around with the corpse (Christians)
• Church service before final interment (burial) [Christians]
• In Christian homes, the day before a funeral the dead persons were brought home and placed in their bedrooms/sitting rooms/balcony. Family members then hold a vigil until the next morning.

Novel and Entertainment in Funeral Activities
The novel and entertaining aspects of the funeral activities were hereunder grouped into two. First group highlighted the novel part of funeral activities, while the other showed the entertainment aspects of the funeral activities.

Novel
• Crying and wailing is more serious where the deceased was young
• Sympathisers crying as well to express their solidarity
• Smiling at the same time to welcome Guests when the deceased was aged
• Changes in the mood of the sympathisers to express funny situation or crack jokes
• Sympathisers come with items such as food items, goat, money) to support the bereaved based on their intimacy
• Sympathisers cried when they were nearer to the bereaved house
• Eating and fighting over distribution of foods while the grieving was on
• People who were older than the deceased stayed away as a mark of respect for the custom and tradition
• Only the Christians used well polished coffin to burying the deceased,
• The choice of quality of coffin used was optional; mats are often used by the Muslims to bury their dead persons.

Entertainment
• Music is provided by the invited band stand or Local Music providers
• Uninvited singers and drummers trooped in to complement the entertainment of everybody
• The bereaved dressed in dresses that typically marked them out and show their mood and relationship with the deceased;
• The Widow or widower who were Christian dressed in black beautiful dresses
• Children or siblings of the deceased dressed in beautiful dresses with any colour that suit them
• People wear uniform (Aso Ebi) in solidarity with their bereaved
• Women dressed and beautifully make up their faces but will still grief whenever the situations warrant it.
• Eating, drinking and dancing to the music accompanied the interment of the deceased
• Dancing became passionate as the event progressed
• At this point it was difficult to know that the dancers were once bereaved earlier
• Spraying of the dancers with money as a mark of appreciating the dancing steps and entertainment became noticeable
• Where standing rule on alcohol consumption was absent people drank to stupor

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study has demonstrated that virtually all the respondents have witnessed and participated in funeral activities prior to the time when data collection took place. Experiences gathered during the festival were still fresh based on the fact that the period of participation by the majority of the respondents did not extend beyond 6 months while the most recent participation was less than 1 month to the time when this study was carried out. Data further showed element of intimacy through the type of relationship that existed between the respondents and the deceased when the latter were alive. Perceptions of funeral activities as narrated by the respondents were culturally constructed. While explanations on the need for funeral activities revolved around cultural dictates, factors that actually informed individual participation were generally to enhance social cohesion within the society. Social cohesion, economic reasons and channels for leisure and recreations were the perceived benefits derived from funeral activities.

Differences were noted in the funeral activities at preparatory and final stages among various religious groups within the study area. Among the Muslims and Traditional religious worshippers, the dead are usually buried within 24 hours while the Christians take their corpses to mortuary for preservation till the day earmarked for final burial activities. Incorporation prayer sessions into funeral and elaborate entertainment where the deceased were of ‘ripe age’ were prevalent among all religious groups. Side attractions were also visible during funeral activities among these religious groups; typical example was the dancing with the coffin along with the corpse inside it by the Pall-bearers.

The novel aspects of funeral activities were intermittent crying and cracking of jokes when occasion demands. The voluntary wailing and crying by the sympathizers were other novelty in the event. At this point in time, there may be hot disagreement over simple issue like sharing of food. At the point where the stage was already set for merriment, food and drinks flow easily while dancing became feverish and frenzied. At this stage it is always difficult to assume that people that were wailing and crying incessantly are those now wriggling their bodies to the rhythm of the music being supplied.

**CONCLUSION**

The outcome of this study has shown that leisure and recreation among Africans take place in settings that are typically different from conventional sense. It is therefore not surprising that funeral activities were turned into carnival-like event by the people in the study area. It also explains the rationale behind the making of the periods of funeral activities very entertaining in such peculiar ways particularly where the dead was of ‘ripe age’ and the mourners have good social standing and financially well off.

Activities of the sympathizers and their various contributions during funeral period showed that African funerals are community affairs in which the whole community feels the grief of the bereaved and shares in it. The period of funeral activities also became an opportunity
to declare faith due to the dominance of Christianity as well as Islam in Africa and eventual rejection of certain mourning customs. It is on this note that the funeral activities were never discouraged.

On this note, it is obvious that funeral activities have come to stay in Africa though possible future innovation may not be ruled out in order to meet up with the reality of the time. Therefore, proper understanding of African ways of leisure and recreation will be better appreciated within the events of funeral and related activities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
The ability of individuals, families and communities to give their next of kin a dignified burial remains a very significant cultural event. As such, the ability of individuals to mobilise resources and provide social relief to a household in distress during the funeral process is very important in reconstituting family relations. On the basis of this, the formation of Burial society as obtained in South Africa is recommended. The burial society is a rather unique informal self-insurance scheme designed to absorb some of the expenditure associated with the social activities and cultural requirements of (predominantly black) funerals. It is a burial society and a relatively autonomous, historically distinct mutual aid local institution, which may be occupational or gender based, and whose goal is to provide social relief and support (material and non-material) to a member or member’s family experiencing conditions of distress due to a death. Burial societies are formed by people from mostly the same community to cover the costs of burying members in the event of their death (Ngwenya, 2000, Coetzee, 1997). It operates on the basis of a monthly contribution by a group of people (mostly from the same area and/or family) and a partial payout to assist with funeral costs. Burial societies therefore play a noteworthy role in making it possible for individual members to have direct access to, and control over, financial resources in such times of need. This will prevent the possibility of financial bankrupt at the end of the funeral. Prevention of this will translate to sustainable economic development and social cohesion within the society.

**Contribution to knowledge**
This study demonstrates that:
- In African setting, people created avenue for leisure out of every activities they were involved; this means recreation is implanted into day-to-day activities.
- Impression of western scholars that Africans don’t create time for leisure and recreation is an erroneous belief
- Scholastic works on leisure and recreation in African setting that are limited to conventional aspect of leisure and recreation may not have comprehensive results due to certain environmental, economic and social factors in Africa. Yoruba communities are very rich in cultural heritage which is an essential ingredient for cultural tourism. This can be harnessed as a function for sustainable cultural tourism especially for national integration as it affects the southwestern part of Nigeria.

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