

Samuel ADU-GYAMFI, Emmanuel ANTWI FORDJOUR,
Charles Ofoosu MARFO, Isaac ADJEI FORSON

FUNERALS AMONG THE AKAN PEOPLE: SOME PERSPECTIVES ON ASANTE

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Rezumat

Funeraliile la etnicii Akan: unele perspective referitor la Ashanti

Această lucrare pune în discuție procesele de înmormântare la grupul etnic Akan, unele sisteme de credințe akane și tendințele moderne care au evoluat în ceremoniile funerare. De asemenea, demonstrează complexitățile implicate în organizarea înmormântării începând cu ziua morții care culmina cu celebrarea ritului funerar final. Scopul propriu-zis al înmormântării este de a onora pe morți pentru serviciile lor meritorii de pe pământ, aducându-i în glorie veșnică și integrându-i în lumea de dincolo. Cu toate acestea, exista unele disensiuni care militează împotriva acestor motive pozitive. Drept urmare, unele familii care obișnuiau să fie destul de unite se divizează, iar membrii familiei încetează să mai comunice între ei. În unele cazuri, înmormântările rezultă în litigii care durează ani de zile sau cu ordonanțe, impunând o datorie grea asupra unor familii. Alte familii rămân dezorientate ca urmare a neînțelegerii. Obiectivul acestui studiu este de a identifica factorii și perspectivele care caracterizează procesul înmormântării în rândul Akanilor și în special, al Ashantilor. Studiază procesele înmormântărilor la Akani ca fenomen și schimbările prin care au trecut acestea prin timp.

Cuvinte-cheie: deces, înmormântare, conflict, familie, Akanii, Ashanti.

Резюме

Похороны у аканцев: некоторые перспективы в отношении ашанти

В этой работе обсуждаются процессы проведения похорон этнической группой акан, некоторые системы их верований и современные тенденции, сложившиеся в похоронных обрядах. Также в ней демонстрируются сложности, связанные с организацией похорон, начиная со дня смерти, кульминация которых ознаменовывается заключительным похоронным обрядом. Настоящая цель похорон – почтить память мертвых за их заслуги на земле, возвести их к вечной славе и интегрировать в загробный мир. Однако существует ряд разногласий, препятствующих этим позитивным мотивам. В результате некоторые семьи, отличавшиеся ранее сплоченностью, теперь разделены, а члены этих семей прекратили общаться друг с другом. В отдельных случаях похороны приводят к тяжбам, которые тянутся годами или завершаются судебными распоряжениями, влекущими за собой тяжелые долги некоторых семей. Другие семьи дезорганизованы в результате недопонимания. Це-

лю данного исследования выступает выявление факторов и перспектив, которые характеризуют процесс погребения у аканцев, в частности у ашанти. В статье исследуются погребальные процессы у группы акан как феномен и изменения, которые они претерпели во времени.

Ключевые слова: смерть, похороны, конфликт, семья, аканцы, ашанти.

Summary

Funerals among the Akan people: some perspectives on Asante

This work discusses the processes of celebrating funerals among the Akan people, some Akan belief systems and modern trends that have evolved in funeral ceremonies. It also demonstrates the complexities involved in organizing the funeral from the day of death culminating into the celebration of the final funeral rite. The actual purpose of funeral is to honor the dead for their meritorious services on earth, ushering them into eternal glory and to integrate them into the next world. However, there are often some skirmishes that militate against these positive motives. As a result, some families that used to be closely knitted end up being divided. Other members of a family stop communicating with each other. In some cases, funerals result in legal wrangling lasting for a number of years and some have been slapped with injunctions, leaving a heavy debt on some families. Others are also disorganized as a result of misunderstanding. The objective of this study is to identify the factors and perspectives that characterize funeral celebration among the Akan people, and the Asante in particular. It studies the processes in Akan funerals and the changes they have undergone through time.

Key words: Death, Funeral, Antagonism, Family, Akan, Asante.

1.0 Introduction

Asante is one of the divisions constituting the Akan ethnic groups in Ghana. Found in the Asante and Ahafo Regions of present-day Ghana, the Asante people are not only identified by their geographical location but also by language, culture and tradition¹. Asante refers to both the people and their language. Before the creation of Asante, there existed few Akan clans clustered around Kwaman (Kumase). By the close of the 17th century, these independent clans came together to form Asante. Like other Akan groups, the Asante people have

the same social and cultural heritage. The other groups of Akan such as the Fante, the Akuapem, and the Akyem also celebrate funerals in a similar manner.

Death is an inevitable part of human life. It is the transition point among the Akan people. Whatever is made or created inevitably dies. Asantes perform rituals for their dead kinsmen and loved ones in general [9]. These rituals are defined as 'ayie' (funeral) in the Akan language. The Akan people hold a general belief that death is but a transition into a next world termed locally as *Asamando* (Asante/Akuapim) or *Samanadze* (Fanti) and not necessarily the end of mankind [9; 17, pp. 61-68]. Here, it is only the body which dies; the soul of a person is immortal and lives eternally in *Asamando* [27, pp. 73-89]. The Akan also believe that if an individual lives an exemplary life as an elder and dies, he is transformed into an ancestor. The spirit of this dead person travels to a next world to join a company of ancestors who are believed to be living in *Asamando* [13, pp. 281-287].

In almost all Akan communities, not less than two funerals are celebrated every week [17, pp. 61-68]. The conduct of funerals is seen as avenues where family members and children of the bereaved in particular pay their last respect to the dead [9; 17, pp. 61-68; 19, pp. 247-264]. They believe that once parents cater for their children while alive, they are entreated to organize a proper burial for their parents [9; 17, pp. 61-68; 13, pp. 281-297]. Upon the death of a person, the *abusupanyin* (family head) lead the performance of a ritual, as part of the burial and funeral rites [13, pp. 281-297].

The organization of funerals is closely linked to status enhancement of both the deceased and the bereaved [36; 21]. Among the Akan people, when a funeral is well organized and patronized, the whole family gain accolades [35; 22]. Huge amounts of resources are invested into funeral planning and its celebration, which lead the stakeholders to incur significant debts as they rely mostly on loans [6, pp. 604-614; 37; 22]. It is revealed by the literature that the (financial) resources which are pumped into funerals are primarily to impress the general public [35; 37; 31]. Sometimes, those who borrow from the banks to invest in funerals have their assets confiscated stemming from their inability to redeem their debts [1]. This, to a large extent, has raised concerns as there have been several attempts by some traditional rulers to ban extravagant funeral ceremonies. All efforts to reduce the cost of funerals have proved futile. Boateng (The Spectator, March 25 2009) and Blay, (Ghanaian Times, 2008) have all lamented over expensive funeral celebrations.

Social changes coupled with technological advances have reformed the way the funeral and its associated rituals are being conducted [13, pp. 281-297; 3, pp. 1-20]. Today's funeral activities have been accompanied by huge advertisements and different cultural displays [18, 79-106; 9]. The above notwithstanding, little or less interdisciplinary study has been done to highlight grey areas concerning funerals among the Akans and Asante in particular. It is envisaged that this particular study shall fill such hiatus.

2.0 Method of the Study

This research uses a qualitative research approach based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation have been used to obtain data for the research. Ten (10) expert informants who have knowledge about Akan and Asante funerals and have witnessed funeral celebrations for a period not less than thirty years were purposively selected and interviewed. Relying on ethnographic technique, the researchers also attended different funerals at different times. Information gathered through observation, participation, interviews and literature sources have been pieced together to provide a useful narrative which captures continuity and change in funeral rites among the Akans of Ghana and the Asante in particular.

3.0 Discussions

3.1 The Akan Concept of Death

Death is the only truly universal aspect of the human experience; one that invites a diversity of responses across cultures. It is defined as "the physical cessation of life" of an aged or traumatic person. Dying is defined as "the visible process of decline and physical expiration of an individual", and bereavement is defined as "the emotional and psychological feeling of those involved with or close to the dead person" [38]. Death is therefore a human experience and bereavement is seen as the expression of human emotions [25]. Death is perceived to be unsympathetic, callous, sadist and unforgiving inter alia. The universality of death is expressed in several metaphorical Akan maxims; "*owu adar nndow baako*", meaning death's cutlass does not weed only one individual. The same idea is conveyed in the symbol of universal ladder which every person is believed to climb; "*owu atwer baako mmfow*" meaning, death's ladder is not climbed by only one individual [15]. In Akan, death is a matter of public concern. It is normally said that *Baabi a obi awuo, obi nna* (none sleeps where there is death).

The belief in immortality, in the soul's survival after death, is a concept the Akan people do not repudiate [5; 27, pp. 73-89]. In the Akan scheme of things, it is only the body which dies after death; the soul con-

tinues to live and it is sometimes brought back into the world through the concept of reincarnation [27, pp. 73-89]. By dying, a person is believed to be born into the family of the ancestral spirits through the living and his descendants [24]. Agyeman [4, p. 14] posits that for a person to enter into glory in the next world, a befitting burial is required. Again, the Akan people recognize two types of death, “*owu pa*” (good death) and “*owu bone*” (bad death). An individual who dies of a natural cause – principally caused by illness – is considered to have died a good death. According to van der Geest [34, pp. 899-911], good death comes naturally after a long and well-lived life. People who die “*owu pa*” can also be associated with those who attain 70 years or more before dying [1]. Some scholars associate good death with dying peacefully [34, pp. 899-911; 20, pp. 422-432]. In essence, Asante regard good death as dying peacefully, and most importantly not dying from any form of “*bonsam yare*”². In support of the above, Ko et al. (2015) postulate that dying peacefully, not suffering, experiencing spiritual connection and making peace with others before dying are all classified as good death.

Bad death, on the other hand, is when a person dies through accident or violent means [20, pp. 422-432; 9]. Deaths which are caused by sickness like tuberculosis and leprosy are considered as bad deaths [9]. In the past, people who died in accidents and from diseases like leprosy and epilepsy were not buried decently to be differentiated from those who died naturally [1]. Their ghost becomes “*tɔfo*”; a kind of wandering and aggressive spirit. It is argued that the universe is said to be everywhere imbued with spirits [22]. In the analysis of funeral rites, the most important spirits are those of the deceased members of the lineage [29; 9]. The ancestral spirits, known locally as *nananom nsamanfo*, who live in *Asamando*³, decide the fate of their descendants (*asefo*) on earth [9; 1].

It is argued that funerals are celebrated by the Asante people to honor their dead relatives; any person whose funeral was not celebrated lingers on the path which leads to the land of the dead [28; 9; 17, pp. 61-68]. Due to the great importance given to the belief in life after death, certain practices were undertaken by the Asante people upon the death of an individual. Among such practices fasting is included [9; 1]. The idea of fasting was not total abstinence from every food but from certain staple foods, which were considered the major delicacies of the people [9; 1]. Food prepared with plantain, cassava and/or cocoyam are mostly such foods which are forbidden during the period. Foods made from maize could be eaten, since ‘*fufu*’ and ‘*ampesi*’ are considered the major delicacies of the Asante [9]⁴. The elderly chew

kola nut to symbolize an exhibition of grief. The singing of dirges by women also shows the mood of the people [3, pp. 1-20].

For a funeral to be accorded its expected success, the number of dignitaries in attendance is used as the yardstick to measure such success. Sayings such as “*ayie yi aba*”, loosely translated as “this funeral has been well-patronized or well-attended” support this position. Funerals are organized not only as the final bid of farewell to the dead, but to also show the affection of the community towards the deceased [6, pp. 604-614]. The phrase “*Yerehye no animuonyam*” (We are glorifying the dead) is normally used by the family of the deceased [9]. For a funeral to be well-attended, it depends on the deceased’s social status, inter-personal relationship within the community among others [32].

3.2 The Day of Death

In the past, the rites on the day of death began with the offer of water to the dying by the “*abusua-panyin*” (family head) before the last breath [30; 9]. As the water is given, the head says to the departing spirit, “permit all the women of the household to bear children” [30]. It was believed that the last water would provide enough strength to the dying to be able to climb the lofty slope between the land of the living and the ghosts. After the death, the members of the household would lock the doors and proceed to wash the corpse thoroughly with hot water [9; 1] to prepare the body for public display and its journey to “*Asamando*”. The washing of the body was done by close relatives or children, especially women [1]⁵. Alcohol was poured down the throat of the corpse to prevent early decomposition [30]. Also, salt solution, lime and camphor balls were all used to preserve the corpse [1]. Adu-Gyamfi argues that precolonial elderly women had a way of draining water from dead bodies by using traditional herbs and spices to prevent decomposition. This involved placing the corpse flat on its stomach to allow water to drain through the nose, ears and other pores on the body [1].

In the quest to inform the general public on the demise of a member, dirges were sung and a gun fired [1; 3, pp. 1-20]. A pot of palm wine was sent to the *Odikro*’s palace to announce the decease, failure of which attracted a fine [9]. The corpse was dressed in decent clothing of its own, for public display (Ibid.). “Its wrists were tied with ornaments of a certain form⁶, shape or design, regarded as ‘ghost’ or ‘soul’ money – i. e. “*saman sika*” or “*kra sika*” – and packets of gold dust, i.e. “*sika futuru*”, were tied to its loincloth” [35; 36, pp. 33-40; 8]⁷.

After a wake of a day or two, preparations were made on the pre-burial rites. The first of these rites

was the presentation of burial articles, known as “*adesiedee*” in the Akan language [9; 6, pp. 604-614]. The donors of the presents belonged to the following categories: the head of the lineage and his people, children, paternal relations, the head of the political unit to which the deceased belonged⁸, widowers or widows and close friends [3, pp. 1-20; 9; 6, pp. 604-614]. The burial items include pieces of cloth, rings and sums of money tied in handkerchiefs, mats, pillows and toiletries [23].

Contemporary Ghanaian society and Asante in particular have seen changes in material culture [9; 13, pp. 281-297]. The burial presents or gifts of today are more elaborate than those of the previous centuries. The presents are accompanied by messages to dead relatives in the land of ghosts and prayer to the ghost of the deceased. In contemporary Asante, the dead is now preserved for days before burial due to advancement in technology [13, pp. 281-297; 9]. A woman hinted:

“...in the past, we had to burry our dead member within two days. I recall that when my grandmother died we had nothing to preserve the dead for long. We only relied on banana and plantain leaves as a means of preserving the corpse which in essence do not last longer. She was buried the next day” (Akua Adomaa, Kumasi, 2018).

This is in line with the findings of a study on Adanse which emphasized that due to the absence of mortuaries in the past, the dead was buried within forty-eight (48) hours [1].

3.3 Pre-Funeral Discussions

Pre-funeral discussions usually begin with the ‘One Week’ celebration where the bereaved family discusses matters pertaining to the funeral [7]. In the morning of the celebration, sympathizers throng to the venue to express their condolences to the bereaved family with a handshake. The stakeholders of the funeral discuss the budget and the modalities of the funeral. These include, the amount to be spent on foodstuffs, drinks, accommodation for those coming from afar among others. Pre-colonial Asante society was a communal one, in which funeral expenses were the responsibility of the family. Contemporary Asante society put the burden of the expenses partly on the wife and children. Sarpong [32, p. 64] posits that, the eighth-day, ‘*Nnawotweda*’ is observed as commemoration for the deceased. Six weeks after that, on the 42nd day, *adaduanan*, there is another observation in honor of the dead⁹. The 84th day, *adaduowotwe*, is also commemorated. The anniversary of the deceased is usually celebrated in a year. After this, all forms of mourning for the widow/widower come to an end¹⁰. A special ritual is done

to separate the marriage between the deceased and the partner. In all these commemorative days, it is only the eighth day that is celebrated in grand style [7]. For the others, libations are poured to call on the gods for good health and long life. After a year, the tomb is unveiled at the cemetery and this ends the traditional commemorative days [9; 32].

3.4 Children’s Responsibilities in Funeral

According to Korai and Souiden [19, pp. 247-264], funeral rites is a ‘duty imposed’ on a group by which all individuals give their collective responses or support. A study on the Dagara people of Ghana revealed that funeral rites give room for home-ties and demonstration of family support [7; 31].

Children are supposed to cater for the cost of coffin for their parents [7]. Traditionally, they are obliged to pay the bills on the digging and decoration of the grave. Any child who eschews this responsibility is castigated by severing his contact with the family. In the past, the family bore this responsibility [9]. Social change has weakened the communal nature of the family, changing their roles in funeral celebrations [9; 33; 26]. In contemporary times, money is raised as a loan from the bank or from rich individuals [9]. Sometimes, the societies or groups the deceased joined could pay for the coffin [7].

The children collaborate with other members of the family to organize the funeral. In instances where the family of the deceased parent is annoyed with his children, it affects their commitment during the funeral. In contemporary times, when a parent dies, the children do not solely depend on the extended family members.

The Akan people say “*Wo ni wu a, na w’abusua asa*” (You have no family left when your mother dies). Albert Camus in his novel, *Le tranger* also emphasizes that *On a qu’une mere*. –we have only one mother, signifying a great concern to lose a mother. Among the Asante people, fathers are believed to belong to a different family [26]. Some fathers are polygamists having children with different women. When such a father dies, the children make sure they do not become financially entangled because they do not have any mutual or deep affinity to him. If a father had children with only one woman, they reach a consensus with the family and foot all the funeral bills. All these are agreed upon during the “*nnawotweda*” [32].

3.5 The Burial Day

Burial services in the previous centuries followed immediately after the death of an individual, specifically within 48 hours [1; 9]. The advancement in technology has altered the burial services in this twenty-first century as the body can be preserved in

morgues for a relatively longer period [9; 26; 7]. Also, urbanization and modernity have greatly influenced how burial services are organized [26]. Significantly, a corpse could be preserved in a mortuary for as long as the families can put resources together [9; 18, pp. 79-106; 2, pp. 257-271], usually between a week and a year. A person from a wealthy family and Kings can be preserved for more than a year [1].

Opanyin Kwadwo Poku hinted:

“Some dead parents might have their wards abroad and all of them might wish to attend the funeral. Based on this, the body is kept in the morgue for not less than three months. Some educated and affluent in societies too prefer that the body of their parents be kept in the morgue for at least a month. It will be humiliating to bury your parents within one week of his or her death. That will be frowned upon by members of the society since it is equivalent to not honoring the parent. Preservation in this way paves the way for the family to prepare adequately for the funeral” (Kwadwo Poku, interview, 2018).

Religious beliefs have also influenced funeral rites [9; 26; 6, pp. 604-614]. Islam recommends basic burial for its deceased followers, whose souls are all believed to be equivalent in the eyes of Allah [9]. Though not embraced by a majority in villages and towns, Christianity has weakened many of the beliefs and practices of the African traditional religion, ushering the advancement of the conversion of traditional events into modern or Christian ones [9; 6, pp. 604-614].

Nowadays, bodies are brought to the funeral grounds on Fridays [7]. It is kept and laid at the dawn of Saturday. Personal observations have revealed that some people, due to their religious belief system and affiliations bring the dead person on Wednesday and lay it in state on Thursday at dawn before it is buried (Observation, Kumasi 2019). Of late, some religious groups like the Seventh-Day Adventist Church bury their church members on Sundays because they consider Saturdays as Sabbath day.

Before the arrival of the mortal remains, family houses are renovated and decorated [9; 6, pp. 604-614]. Some houses which have not been painted for years are painted; dilapidated houses are also renovated to curb disgrace [6, pp. 604-614]. People who have lived in the city for years and are well-known at their work places, their churches and their suburbs, ensure that the body of their parents are laid in a well decorated house to maintain their social esteem [18, pp. 79-106]. On the burial day, members of the family assemble in the family house [9]. The Akan people say, “*Akobofoɔ aba fie*” to literally mean “funerals send family members, who have not gone to their hometown for a long-time, home”.

At dawn, around 4:30 am, the mortal remains are unveiled and relatives, friends and sympathizers throng it and cry aloud to express their grief [9; 35; 7]. At about 7am, family members and sympathizers donate “*adesiedee*” (valedictory items) in the form of money or items like handkerchiefs, rings and cloth among others [1; 18, pp. 79-106]. These items are displayed to show love for the departed. At a funeral in Kentenkrono-Kumasi, a funeral announcer mentioned that:

All the people gathered here should pay attention. The man you see here is called Mr. Owusu, a friend of the deceased. He “has in his hand a piece of cloth, a scarf, two Ghana cedis, and «*hyentiadee*» (ring). Since his friend is embarking on an unending journey, he has to use the cloth to dress after arriving at *Asamando*, the handkerchief is to wipe his sweat while journeying to his ancestors and the money is to buy water when he is thirsty on the way” (Adwoa Akyaa, Kumasi, 2018).

If there is a widow or widower, his or her valedictory item (*adesiedeE*) is brought last before the body is put into a coffin. The above confirms the Akan belief in the next world and life after death [30; 22; 9; 27, pp. 73-89]. These indigenous beliefs of Akans commit to the reality of ancestral spirits and a next world after death [9; 27, pp. 73-89]. It is reported that the community of the dead exist concurrently with the community of the living; with a beneficial relationship between them [1].

The coffin used to bury the dead is another point for discussion. Expensive coffin is lauded by the mourners [18, pp. 79-106]. Statements like “*ne mma no aye adee oo*” – his/her children have done well – are used to express it. Elites are normally the ones who do large funerals and also use expensive caskets [9; 18, pp. 79-106]. Burying beyond one’s means is specifically the implicit social rule [9; 18, pp. 61-68].

If the dead is a Christian, the priest and the church members would conduct burial service for him/her at either the funeral grounds or the cemetery [9; 7]. In some churches, the corpse is taken to the chapel for the burial service. Tributes from the church, children, widow/er, and family are read and final prayer said before the body is taken to the cemetery [7; 9; 35]. For non-Christians, traditional prayer in the form of libation is said. At the burial ground, the traditional prayer is said for even the Christians. The body is buried and all return to their homes in preparation for the funeral (Personal Observation at Kumasi, 2019).

3.6 The Funeral

Funerals have always been a main social event in the Akan society of Ghana [35; 7], requiring huge sums of money [9; 18, pp. 79-106; 6, pp. 604-614].

As people come near their old age; they think about death and their funeral in particular. The irony is that, sometimes whenever a person is sick, he or she is neglected by some family members but when he or she dies, a funeral is organized. One's social standing calls for the amount of money that is invested into his funeral [9; 18, pp. 79-106; 1]. To be given a decent funeral is an acknowledgement that one lived a useful and worthy life [36, pp. 33-40]. A parent, who has given birth to more children and has catered for them to be rich, is often given an ostentatious funeral (Yaa Badu, Personal Interview, Kumasi, 2018). Among the Asante people, there is the display of precious gifts and items such as "shiny basins filled with imported liquors, canned soft drinks, prestigious textiles, golden funeral regalia, and stacks of foreign and local currency" [18]. According to Amponsah [6, pp. 604-614], the presentation of these gifts is a ritual known as 'adesoa'. This is done by all the in-laws of the bereaved family to enhance the status of the dead (18, pp. 79-106; 6, pp. 604-614).

There are two types of funerals, namely; "*doteyie*" and "*ayipa*" [3, pp. 1-20]. The period the dead body is laid in state till the burial is what we term as *doteyie*. In the past, with no morgues, the "*doteyie*" was performed within the first three days of a person's death [3, pp. 1-20]. Agyekum [3, pp. 1-20] reports that during the "*doteyie*", sympathizers come to mourn with the bereaved family without necessarily donating money and items to the family. The "*ayipa*" (actual funeral) could be postponed to a different date. Today, funerals mostly follow the burial, because the existence of morgues makes it possible to keep corpses for family members to be adequately prepared.

Funerals can either take place in the deceased's hometown or the place where he spent most of his years. This situation has emerged as a result of rural-urban drift. An elderly woman reported:

"...some people have migrated to cities for so many years, built their house(s) and reproduced children there. Sometimes the children do not even know the hometown of their parents. In this regard, when a parent dies, they can decide to perform the burial service at where the deceased stayed in the city and bury him/her in the hometown to save both time and resources and to ensure high patronage of the funeral" (Yaa Badu, Boadi-Kumasi, 2018).

Most chiefs kick against the idea of performing funeral rites at a location outside of the home-town of the deceased. In their quest to call for development into the community, chiefs entreat the funerals of natives to be held in their hometowns [31; 1]. Maame Akua Fosua of Offinso New Town hinted:

... If all the aspects of the funeral are performed in the deceased's hometown, it will pave way for development. Some wealthy people will build houses in their hometown, so that they will not be disgraced during their funeral or the funeral of their relatives. Most sympathizers attend funerals only to observe the dark side of the bereaved family. They will therefore say things like; "he was living comfortably in the city but could not build a single room in his hometown." This forces wealthy people to put up buildings in their hometowns (Maame Akua Fosua of Offinso New Town, 2018).

Presently, when the urban nuclear family of a deceased organizes a "church funeral" in the city, the burial takes place in the home-village of the deceased [31]. Funerals mostly follow the burial ceremony. There have been some conceptions that "if a dead person is buried and some months elapse before the funeral is performed, it will not be well-patronized". Therefore, at most, one week should be between burial and funeral (Interview with Obaapanyin Ama Nyame of Kumasi-Ayigya, 2018).

3.6.1 (Nsawa) Funeral Donation

Funerals are instances of exchanges and redistribution of resources [21]. Significantly, the Akan people resort to the collection of *nsawa* to defray funeral debts. The idea of *nsawa* expounds the Akan emphasis on communalism rather than individualism. In Asante, it is irresponsible to attend funerals without making donation [3, pp. 1-20]. The donation of resources or the *nsawa* is meant to recoup the financial resources lost in funerals [3, pp. 1-20; 21; 7]. Between 1:00 pm and 6:00 pm, the bereaved family mounts tables to receive donations normally in cash [3, pp. 1-20; 13, pp. 281-297]. Some sympathizers send the gifts on different days either before or after the funeral celebration. The donation of gifts is not only in monetary terms. Sympathizers can present gifts such as foreign and/or local drinks and water among other things to the bereaved family [13, pp. 281-297].

Our observations revealed that both the nuclear and extended families could mount separate tables for the collection of *nsawa*. This is normally done when the two families have some form of conflict or want to avoid conflict. This can happen in instance where the bereaved (man) left a polygamous home. When this happens, during accountability, the cost of providing shade (canopy), chairs and hired musical instruments among others are shared among the half-siblings.

3.7 Funeral Expenses

The funeral grounds of a pure Asante funeral, needs to be animated with music; traditional and some foreign music or live band. Hiring of musical

instruments to play music at funerals celebration runs concurrently with traditional ensembles and dance performances [6, pp. 604-614]. Among some of the traditional dances include *kete*, and *adowa*. Funerals are mostly conducted for two days. In some situations, Saturday and Sunday; Thursday and Friday; or Sunday and Monday depending on one's religious orientation.

3.7.1 Costs on Advertisement

Funeral advertisement forms part of the cost of funerals in Akan communities including Asante. An interviewee hinted:

Funeral advertisement is not a present phenomenon; I have been witnessing it since the time of my birth. In the past, we used "*dawuro*" to announce and advertise the demise of a family member. This, in essence, was to call for both sympathizers and generate resources in particular to support the funeral celebration (Interview with Maame Akua Duku of Amakom-Kumasi, 2018).

Changes in the society and improvement in technology have shaped the mode of advertisement. People use numerous advertisements both in the print and the electronic media. In the United States of America, the media houses and newspapers announce and advertise funeral celebrations [10]. The literature on funerals has revealed that this practice persists among the Akan and Asante in particular [13, pp. 281-297; 6, pp. 606-614; 14; 37]. Giant billboards are mounted in parts of the cities or towns which stretches the cost of funerals [37; 14]. Some families incur serious debts. Among the people of Bekwai in Asante, it has been reported that over 2000 Ghana Cedis can be spent on funeral advertisement [6, pp. 606-614]. These funeral advertisements are manifested through funeral announcement on the various information centers, radio and television stations; publications in the daily national newspapers, and posters, leaflets and bill boards [13, pp. 281-297; 6, pp. 606-614; 10]. Significantly, the cost of expensive funeral advertisements are sometimes accentuated due to the extensive use of electronic media coupled with the erection of bill boards.

3.7.2 Accommodation Expenses

During funerals, some of the mourners travel long distances and are sometimes required to spend some nights. When this happens, organizers spend on accommodation. If a father or mother dies, the spouse of the bereaved attends the funeral with their family and friends [18, pp. 79-106; 13, pp. 281-297]. They can number up to twenty or more and some of them have to be accommodated and served with food and drinks throughout the funeral. Among the Akans, in-laws are to be provided the requisite hospi-

ality when they attend a funeral. In turn, the in-laws of the family donate "*nsawa*" to the bereaved family [13, pp. 281-297]. In certain instances too, mattresses are hired for sympathizers to sleep on.

3.7.3 Other Related Costs

Unlike the olden days where caskets were carried on a structure or shoulder to the cemetery, this generation use hearse to convey the body from the mortuary to the funeral place and finally to the cemetery. The purchase of the casket and matters relating to the tomb digging and decoration are the duties of the deceased's children [17, pp. 61-68; 9]. This is a traditional obligation which enjoins them to build a house to accommodate their mother or father [17, pp. 61-68]. If a child refuses to pay his or her part, he or she can be sanctioned and will not be allowed to inherit any property of the mother or father. It is the dream of every child to buy an expensive casket to bury his or her mother or father to glorify them [9; 7].

Due to modernization, some families buy new and common cloth to glorify the dead person [8]. Some of them buy it for themselves and for their children. In some instances, two clothes are bought. One to be worn on Saturday and the other for thanksgiving service on Sunday. There is also the printing of the tribute booklet. It contains the biography of the dead and the tribute from the wife, children, church and friends which also cost a lot. Chits to collect drinks and receipt booklets are also printed. In Asante, the food given to the sympathizers is contingent upon the amount such a person donates. In an interview, a woman reported that:

The amount a person donates determines the kind of items s/he receives at the funeral. If it is 5 cedis, the donor will take nothing more than bottled water. Your donation determines the kind of reception you receive in the cause of a funeral. I have personally witnessed some occasions where those that donate 5 hundred cedis and above are taken to decorated places where they can feel comfortable to eat and enjoy their meals and other items in peace (Interview with Maame Grace Ofosu at Boadi-Kumasi, 2018).

Also, souvenirs such as key holders, handkerchiefs, and cups among others are given to donors. Extravagant funerals leave heavy debt on the family and sometimes the traditional state as a whole [9; 8, 13, pp. 281-297]. Several attempts have thus been made to counter the commitment of resources for an expensive funeral [12; 11; 6, pp. 604-614]. As reported by Appiah:

In a debate on the floor of Parliament, the Minority Leader, Alban Bagbin, is reported to have said that 'we are investing in the dead rather than the living through expensive funerals and that is bad'. He

added that the dead should be given decent and not expensive burials knowing very well that whatever was done to the dead it was destined for the grave. On the same issue, Hon Alfred Agbesi, MP for Ashiaman, who revealed that he had bought 13 pieces of mourning cloths in one year, called for the introduction of one cloth for all funerals. He argued among other things that, “after spending on expensive cloths, coffins and keeping the corpse in expensive morgues, the widow and children are left with nothing and are expected to fend for themselves” [8].

3.8 Accounting for Funeral (*Ekabuo*)

Most Akan funerals take place on Saturday and Sunday and on Monday. Led by the funeral secretary, the family meets to render accounts. Sometimes, the “*abusuapanyin*” renders it solely. He is in possession of the funeral fund and he can veto decisions. He can also absorb funeral debts if there is any. At one funeral account rendering, the “*abusuapanyin*” reported that:

drinks cost GHS 4, 000; food – GHS 3,000; the hiring of canopies (GHS 4,000); beds hired cost (1000) etc. In all, the money used for the funeral amounted to GHS 12,000 and the *nsawa* and other donations also amounted to GHS 10,000. In this respect, the family has incurred a debt of GHS 2000. “*Yenyinaa yesempa; eka aba*” (we have run at a lost), so what do we do? (Abusuapanyin Kofi Osei, 2018).

The account does not always result in losses. Some families make gains at the end of funeral celebrations. When huge debt is incurred, it is the responsibility of the family to defray. Sometimes, the deceased's property like houses, cars and lands among others are sold or rented to cater for the costs incurred. During these instances, the “*abusuapanyin*” retains the power to accept the opinions or decisions of other family members in relation to the cost defrayal. When someone dies interstate, the “*abusuapanyin*” shares the properties amongst the children of the deceased. Concerning wills and testament, the PNDC law 111 in Ghana cured the mischief that were attached to the distribution of the estate or wealth of a departed individual.

3.9 Modern Trends

Some churches use welfare services to cater for some expenses such as the coffin and the gown for the deceased. As reported elsewhere in the study, other groups and societies the deceased joined in his lifetime are also permitted to give support toward the burial arrangement and the funeral in particular [7].

Individualism, modernity, and formal education inter alia have supported the ways of the nuclear family [26; 33]. The larger family members are not active in the affairs of the nuclear members. Children

are now allowed the liberty to organize the funeral of a deceased parent based on their financial strength [13, pp. 281-297, 17, pp. 61-68]. Agya Kwasi Antwi of Anwomaso-Kumasi hinted that:

Due to social changes, the extended family support in funerals is changing. Children are now left to take the decision as to how and when they want to conduct the funerals of their parents. During the one-week celebration, they are normally asked the amount they anticipate to use in the celebration of the funeral ceremony. Although the extended family members may be present, they partially comment on this amount. It is not mandatory for an extended family member to contribute towards funeral expenses.

As reported earlier in this paper, funerals are not mostly celebrated in the hometown of the deceased. However, families insist on the burial of the deceased in his hometown [21]. Today, the “*doteyie*” is followed immediately by the “*ayipa*”. Mortuaries aid in preserving the body of the deceased for some time before the funeral, in this respect the “*doteyie*” and the “*ayipa*” may be combined [3, pp. 1-20].

The act of fasting, which was a mandate observed by family members during the demise of their member and the funeral itself in the past, is no longer practiced [13, pp. 281-297; 6, pp. 604-614]. Amponsah argues that “people now expect to be served with food and drinks at funeral grounds” [6, pp. 604-614].

Funerals have taken serious economic turns leading people in Asante to borrow to invest. People take the risk as entrepreneurs to borrow huge amounts from individuals and banks in anticipation of using the *nsawa* to defray such costs and make some gain. Remittances are also received from family members abroad to invest into the funeral [21]. These remittances are mostly mishandled by some family members, sometimes resulting in conflicts [21].

4.0 Conclusion

During funeral ceremonies, Akans exhibit their cultural values in public for others to cherish the significance of these values. Kings and Queen mothers demonstrate their adornment, popularity and pride to the entire traditional state. Rich men and women also demonstrate their wealth, notoriety and love and affection for the deceased and family by their massive attendance and donations. It is becoming the most popular among the other Akan cultural institutions since it is frequently held in cities, towns and villages almost every week or month. Today, the various institutions in the Ghanaian community have witnessed and undergone rapid changes with various impacts on societies and the country at large.

The conduct, celebration and investment into funerals have changed over the years. We have witnessed changes in the role of individuals within the family. All costs are now catered for by the children of the deceased with little support from other family members. Funeral is now a social and economic activity where individuals want to be accorded prestige and make considerable gains. The Akan culture of communalism, which requires collective efforts during occasions like funerals, is generally depleting. Modernity and greed seem to accentuate this negative trend.

Informants

Interview with Akua Adomaa (born in 1932) at her residence in Kumasi, 2018.

Interview with Yaa Badu (born in 1965) at her residence in Boadi-Kumasi, 2018.

Interview with Maame Akua Fosua (born in 1946) at her residence in Offinso New Town, 2018.

Interview with Obaapanyin Ama Nyame (born in 1938) at her residence in Ayigya-Kumasi, 2018.

Interview with Akua Duku (born in 1946) at her residence in Amakom-Kumasi, 2018.

Interview with Grace Ofofu (born in 1964) at her residence in Boadi-Kumasi, 2018.

Interview with Abusuapanyin Kofi Osei (born 1937) at his residence in Suame-Kumasi, 2018.

Interview with Agya Kwasi Antwi (born 1972) at his residence in Anwomaso-Kumasi, 2018.

Interview with Adwoa Akyaa (born 1966) at a funeral grounds in Kentenkrono-Kumasi, 2018.

Interview with Opanyin Kwadwo Poku (born 1956) at his residence in Kentenkrono-Kumasi, 2018.

Note

¹ The people of New Juaben (Dwaben) in the Eastern Region of Ghana for instance are a broken part of the original Dwaben people in Asante due to the Asante Civil War in 1832–1834.

² *Bonsam yare* can be translated into English to mean unclean sickness. Among the Asante these diseases include leprosy, convulsion or leprosy, tuberculosis and madness among others. In view of this, anyone who dies of any of the above disease is considered to have died bad death irrespective of the age.

³ *Asamando* is the ancestral world in the Akan language

⁴ *Fufu* is made from the mixture of plantain and cassava by pounding the ingredients in a locally made mortar until a fine texture is achieved. Ampesi on the other hand is prepared by cooking plantain, cassava, yam or cocoyam.

⁵ Adu-Gyamfi [1] argues that it was the concern of preventing the disclosure of disgraceful things on the deceased to the public that forced family members to wash their deceased members. In a similar manner, Agyekum [3, pp. 1-20] is of the view that the washing and dressing of the corpse was done by the women of

the family.

⁶ This depended on the deceased status; kings as well as other royals and/or people with high social status enjoyed these things.

⁷ *Sikafuturu* was an Asante currency used in the 19th century.

⁸ The *Asantehene* (King of Asante), himself would send burial things if the deceased had been a functionary, e.g. *ahenkwa*, at the palace.

⁹ During the *adaduanan*, the belonging of the deceased is shared amongst the siblings and children.

⁰ This day is locally termed as *Afenhyiada*, by the Akan ethnic group.

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- Adu-Gyamfi Samuel** (Kumasi, Ghana). PhD in History, Senior Lecturer and Head of Department of History and Political Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.
E-mail: mcgyamfi@yahoo.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0193-867X>
- Antwi Fordjour Emmanuel** (Kumasi, Ghana). Department of Language and Communication Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).
E-mail: eafordjour@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0415-304X>
- Marfo Charles Ofofu** (Kumasi, Ghana). Associate Professor, Vice Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Head of the Department of Language and Communication Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.
Email: cofosu-marfo.socs@knust.edu.gh; cmarfo@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9786-1568>
- Adjei Forson Isaac** (Kumasi, Ghana). Department of Language and Communication Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).
E-mail: iadjeiforson@yahoo.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8867-2503>