

11. TAKING "OZO" TITLE IN IGBO LAND

What is taking "ozo" title?

Taking "ozo" title is an honor among the Igbos which enjoys great respect. It is the highest honor in the land, and is a sign of wealth and prosperity. Although it is not prevalent over the entire land, where it does not exist there will be found other traditions to replace it. Locations where "ozo" title is taken are: Nachi, Ngwo, Eke, Nsude, Abo, Ukana, Ohum, Afa and Umulumbe in Udi Division; Oghe, Owa, Olo, Oha, Umana, Iwolo, Umumba and Obinofia in Ezeagu Division; Oraifite, Ozubulu, Amichi, Utu, Ezinifite and Nnewi in Nnewi Division. Others are Oka, Ugwuoba, Onicha and Aguleri. In Aguata Division, Achina, Umuchu, Ekwulobia and Nanka also take "ozo." All these towns are in Anambra State. In Imo State, some towns around Olu, Nkwere, Owere in Oguta Division also take "ozo."

When did "ozo" begin?

It is hard to say exactly when "ozo" began in Igbo land. But there are a couple of stories indicating that our forefathers' practices concerning "ozo" were entirely different from those of today. We know that "ozo" is an accomplishment which people use to show their high position, and that it began countless generations ago. Let us then review these two legends in an effort to find out how "ozo" entered the minds of the Igbo people.

One story tells that "ozo" began on account of a certain slave. During the days of slavery, sometimes the mouths and faces of slaves would be slashed all over, as a means of ill-treatment and oppression. In addition, all slaves wore small red caps like those the "ozo" holders wear today. This story has it that the slave's master took him along when he went to visit his friend. When they reached the friend's house, because of the slave's costume and facial marks, which made him look like a respected elder, the friend gave him kola nut and put him in the chief place of honor. The slave refused, on account of the respect he had for his master, and he gave the kola nut to his master. But this taught the master a lesson. From that day on he did not allow any slave to wear a red cap on his head, and no more marks were cut on the slaves. People then began to cut marks on face and mouth and to wear red caps to signify high position.

The second story resembles the first, in that it also concerns cutting the face and mouth of a slave as a cruelty against him. It is said that the slave began to knock "ofo" on the ground, imploring his guardian spirit to avenge him. His god heard his pleas, and began to afflict people with illnesses to the point of forcing them to invoke divination. What they were told by the diviners was that every man who was fully grown should begin to cut marks on his mouth and face

as a preparation for taking "ozo" title.

These two stories are rather strange, but they are taken as a starting place for the origin of "ozo."

In the old days the prerequisites for "ozo" title were common all over Igbo land. A man would first provide for his father to take "ozo" if his father had not already done so. Then he would make amends for any abominations he was known to have committed. He would also go before those who had taken the title earlier, and question them about any requirements he was not sure of.

How "ozo" title is taken in various areas

Around Udi in Ezeagu Division, the "ozo" aspirant will first sponsor a public feast in Okobo. He will kill a cow, ^{and} three goats and seven cocks and will prepare pounded yam and wine for his guests. He will give them money--as much as forty naira. After this event, perhaps after one or two years, he will begin to "do Okobo." For the performance of Okobo he will also kill one cow, one ram, three goats and seven cocks, provide pounded yam and wine, and money up to forty naira. He does these things before he even starts "ozo" title. Several more years may pass before he actually starts on the title.

When a man wants to take "ozo" title he will call in those in his town who already have taken it and inform them that he too wants to take it. For this purpose he will have pounded yam for them, and will give them meat and pots of wine. The "ozo" holders will enumerate everything he must give to them: one cow, three goats, seven cocks, seven hens, pounded yam, meat, wine, kola nuts and money up to eighty naira. The aspirant will go and engage the services of an Nri herbalist whose specialty is conferring "ozo" titles. He must give him, too, money, three cocks, two hens, one ram, and as many yams as they decide on. He will ask the herbalist what he must do to pursue the "ozo" requirements to a successful conclusion. The title-taking is usually done in dry season, when all the farm products have been harvested. The aspirant will go and sacrifice to various gods, as the herbalist advises, so that they will help in making his title-taking go smoothly. In this area, completion of the requirements takes seven weeks.

Early in the morning, at the beginning of the title-taking, the aspirant will perform a custom called "ida na ngwu" (invoke the forest?).

He will go naked to the grove of his family spirits and confess all the bad things he has done during his lifetime. The people there will be the Nri herbalist and the "ozo" titled men. At nightfall he will be led into a certain house where he will

stay for three weeks, not even coming out into the compound. A young girls will be assigned to run his errands and cook his food. He will remain naked while he is in that house. His wife, or all of his women, will also enter various sacred houses of their own where they, too, will remain for three weeks. At the end of that time the man and his women will emerge, early in the morning of the day the title is to be conferred. The man will sling three cocks and two hens around his neck, his first wife will sling one cock and two hens around her neck, and his other women will each sling one cock and one hen around her neck. In this manner they will go and face their gods. The Nri herbalist and the titled men will be nearby, taking the ram, goat and cock which the man was told to provide, and slaughtering each in turn. Wine and pounded yam will be there in abundance. The man will select one ram on which to swear an oath. That ram will be killed, buried in the ground, and then a "tree of oaths" will be planted on top of it. That "tree of oaths" is used to indicate the number of men who have taken "ozo" in that family. The man will select another ram which will be used to cook stew for the Nri people. After all this, the "ufie" (kind of drum used for waking chiefs up) dance will start. A musician playing an elephant tusk flute will play for the aspirant. A certain woman will should declamations of praise for him.

Everyone will be invited--men, women, children, relatives, inlaws, kith and kin. There will be countless numbers of people present. Food and drink will be available in that compound for seven weeks. On the day the title is taken the "akari" or "ozo" strings will be tied around the man's ankles. At nightfall the man will reenter the sacred house and his women will reenter theirs, where they will all stay for a period of four weeks without coming out into the compound. The man and one small girl who runs his errands will be in that house and no other person will lay eyes on him. Each morning and evening of those four weeks the flutist will be playing to him seven times and he will be answering by calling out all seven of his "ozo" names. In like manner the crier will be shouting for him seven times and he will answer her, giving all of his "ozo" names. After four weeks the titled man and all of his women will perform a sacred bathing, rub camwood on their bodies and dress in beautiful clothes.

In Aguata they have the "ozo" titles of Eze, Okpara and Ume. Eze is the highest one. Towns such as Achina, Umuchu, and Ekwulojia also have these three titles. The first thing an "ozo" candidate does is to perform "Ehihie." To do this he takes four chickens and one goat, cooks food and provides wine. Before the titled guests enter his house to partake

of the feast, the candidate will first display his hospitality by taking one cock, a hen, a goat, and a basket of yams and presenting them to the chiefs in the "ama" (space outside the compound gate). Only this presentation will make the chiefs agreeable to entering the house and eating what has been prepared for them. Other customs which follow are these:

Killing a cow for the chiefs

On the day the cow is killed for the chiefs, food and wine are provided in abundance. The candidate invites his friends and relatives and inlaws. When all the invitees have arrived, the man takes four cows and gives them to the chiefs to kill and share in the eating of them among themselves.

Pouring wine on "ofo"

For this activity, food and drink again are in abundance. The "ozo" candidate gives the chiefs one cow which they kill and share the raw meat among themselves. Then he starts to explain to them about his financial arrangements. He begins with the chief titled man, to whom he gives 100 cowrie shell monies, which equals 20 naira in today's money. The others get a share of five each. After completing this ritual, the candidate answers to only two "ozo" names, which can be Eze Mmaduka, Okpara Nwoke, Ume Ezinwa, or Eke Chukwu, from that time on.

Licking "nzu"
(white clay used for ceremonies)

The candidate for "ozo" title will use one cow and two goats for this activity. He will give the chiefs 400 cowrie shell monies which equal 80 naira in today's money. In addition he will provide 16 each of things like money, wine, yams, kola nuts, pepper, cocks and hens. He does things for the young men in quantities of 64. After this, he enters something called "akwu ozo." (similar to a wake) He gets no sleep at all that night. Young men and women sit with him at his home all night. This usually takes place on Nkwọ day. The noise is so great that the cry of any bird or animal is not heard, because this thing which is prohibited (refers to silence?) can spoil things. At midnight the man is led to the place where one answers "ozo" names so he can finish fulfilling the requirements. At daybreak, he begins the custom of throwing chalk. Again, wine is brought and food is cooked so that everyone who wants it can eat his fill. Food will be cooking in every available spot in the compound, and drums will be beating without cessation. An "ozo" market ceremony serves as the closing of this activity.

In Amichi, Ezinifite and Utu, in Nnewi Division, there are two ways of taking "ozo" title: one which is revealed through divination, and one which the person selects on his own.

The candidate may select one of these names: Dunu, Dara, Ezike or Ume. It takes one year to complete "ozo" requirements, and most people begin them on Orie day. "Ozo" seekers in these towns will do some of these activities: First, "njuaro," which is the opening ritual used to welcome the candidate. Second is "ihu omu" (). The third is to enter the "akwu ozo," which takes seven weeks. The candidate remains in "akwu ozo" answering the drums. While he is there, women do the work of sacrifice. The last thing the candidate does is to take the ceremonial trip to market.

In Nnewi proper, the "ozo" aspirant will first go and ascertain by divination the name he will acquire after he takes the title. This stems from the belief that "ozo" comes as a result of divination. One does not just wake up some day and start answering to the names of Dunu, Dara, Eze, Ume or Dim. Each of these names has a certain prescribed order of rituals associated with it. Only "ozo" Dunu and Eze-ana, which are also the highest "ozo" titles, involve wearing things on the legs. The respect and honor given to them exceeds that of chiefs such as those we have in the four divisions of Nnewi. We have mentioned that there are goats, chickens, cowrie shell money, wine, yams, kola nuts, and chalk in abundance at the house of the "ozo" aspirant.

The "ozo" holders and other titled people, young men and women, including friends and inlaws, all take their share of the largesse.

The position of the wife of a man who is taking "ozo"

This depends on the particular town. In Ngwoo, of Udi Division, the first wife of the "ozo" candidate wears a leg bracelet of coiled copper /called "akari." Her daughter who has married in another town will also wear the "akari," because she will be returning to her father's house many times for various purposes.

Around Udi, the titled man as well as all the women of his household wear "akari" on both legs. In Nnewi, only the chief wife of the candidate can be called "big 'loolo'" or "small 'loolo'." This is done to honor her. The practices are similar in various other towns.

"Ozo" costume

An "ozo" titled man wears a cloth wrapper. He will not wear a divided cloth. He will wear the "ozo" cap with the eagle feather, and beads around his neck. He will hang an "atani" (bent stick containing chains) around his waist and carry an elephant's tusk on his shoulder. He will wear beaded bracelets on his right hand and "akari" on both legs, and will have a cowhide bag slung over his shoulder. He also carries the "ozo" staff.

Special honors accorded "ozo"

Around Udi and in Ezeagu Division the "ozo" holder's food is cooked in a special small room called "mkpo," where the titled man also comes to eat. Whenever an "ozo" man is in the "mkpo" eating, a certain person will be beating a drum for him. When the "ozo" man finishes eating, he strikes his gong and the drummer stops. If the drummer should stop suddenly, the "ozo" man will stop eating. When the "ozo" man drinks wine, someone will be clapping hands for him. This practice is not observed around Nnewi and surrounding towns. In Onicha, chiefs and "ozo" holders do not look at a dead body.

"Ozo market"

When the candidate comes out of the sacred house or "akwu ozo," he and his womenfolk will begin the "ozo" market ceremonies. They involve all four of the Igbo markets. The "ozo" men, along with their friends and relatives, will travel to all of the markets. They will wear "ozo" costume and will be accompanied by drummers, flutists, and criers. Plenty of wine will be brought for the occasion. At the market there will be wrestling dances going on. Friends, inlaws and brothers will be circulating round the market paying tribute to the ones taking title. Their friends will give them gifts such as money, chickens, goats, and cloth. After all this, everyone knows that the person has fully accomplished all the requirements for his "ozo" title.

How "ozo" things are shared

Everyone who has taken "ozo" title will share meat, money, yam and the other things that an "ozo" holder brings. They collect shares according to the length of time they have held the title. In some places, like around Udi, a person can collect two shares for a deceased title holder. When this has been done it is considered that his "ozo" title is dead.

Title without restrictions

Around Udi and in Ezeagu a person can take "ozo" for his son while the son is still small. Such a child is called "Eze ama nso." This means that the child will not be bound by any "ozo" restrictions before he marries. When he grows up and marries, he will kill a goat for the "ozo" group, cook food for them and give them wine. At that time he will start wearing "akari" on his legs and begin to honor everything connected with "ozo." He will then start calling his father "Ogbangwuumu" (one who honors his children). That child will not see his mother's breast again for the rest of his life. On account of this, his mother will perform the ritual for closing up the breasts, and will start to wear garments prepared especially for this.

Rules prohibiting taking "oꝛo" title

"oꝛo" title is not taken by slaves, "osu" (see glossary), bachelors or foreigners. It is solely for native sons.

A murderer or a thief will not take "oꝛo," but if such a person should reform and swear an oath that he will abandon his bad behavior, his relatives and the titled men will be willing to test him during a long probationary period--something like five years.

Prohibitions for "oꝛo" holders

A person who has taken "oꝛo" title must observe many taboos. He must be always upright in behavior. He must not steal, practice sorcery, or commit murder. He must be honest. He must not eat food which does not contain meat, nor is he permitted to eat his food in an open place. He does not wear loincloths nor carry head loads. In some places, such as around Udi and in Ezeagu the "oꝛo" man does not eat the meat of a sheep. Neither do they eat "adu" (a creeping plant with edible fruit, like potato in appearance). In all places, anyone who holds the "oꝛo" title will behave with dignity and self-respect.

These taboos have penalties which are invoked against anyone who disregards them. Such a person will be evicted from his group and he will no longer receive his share of the "oꝛo" perquisites. His ornaments or "oꝛo" strings will be broken off and "oꝛo" honors will no longer be accorded him.

How an "ozo" man is buried

In Olu, an "ozo" man does not go to the land of the spirits in a big coffin. He will be placed in a kind of cupboard, in sitting position. If the deceased has a house with a cement floor, the earth will be dug up, beginning from the compound and going under his house. But if it is a house made of plain building mud, the earth will be dug up inside his house and he will be buried there. An "ozo" man is buried at midnight, with only other "ozo" men present.

Around Udi and in Ezeagu, when an "ozo" man dies, all the rituals he performed when he took the title will be finished by his children before they bury him. They will kill one ram which will be buried with him. In the old days an "ozo" man was not placed in a prone position for burial. He would be placed in sitting position on a burial chair in the grave. But nowadays in many towns they place the body lying down in the grave, one account of the coffins being used. The thoughts going into the funeral of an "ozo" man are more important than the death that he dies.

The state of "ozo" title today

Many changes have taken place in the way "ozo" title is taken and the prohibitions connected with it. These changes were brought on by the coming of the white people and the church, who said that taking "ozo" title was spirit-worship.

Taking "oꝛo" title has remained among the surviving traditions, especially since new forms of taking the title have developed. In some places now, both boys and older men have taken "oꝛo." In many places the confession of the aspirant's past sins is now unnecessary. The chief question now is, "Do you have money?" Various church groups are now thinking seriously of allowing their members the right to take "oꝛo" title in conformity with church beliefs. There are only a few spirit-worshippers left in some places who want to continue doing things as they were done in the past. In many places, cutting "ichi" marks is no longer a prerequisite, unless it is by agreement of the townspeople, as it is in Nnewi. Here, a small mark is made on the body in an inconspicuous place, instead of cutting "ichi" marks. Some title-takers wear trousers, ready-made shirts, and various other garments. Many of them use carved wooden staffs instead of the "akpuļu oꝛo" of split cane. They now wear various styles of caps. In some places, as around Onicha, Oka and Nnewi, money replaces all of the ceremonies. And in some places, "oꝛo" men eat and drink wherever they like, especially in restaurants. The respect and honor involved with the "oꝛo" title has diminished.

Advantages of "ozo" title

"Ozo" title is useful to a town in governing itself. Titled men settle disputes, give advice for the future progress of the town, and help preserve its traditions. In his household, the titled man becomes a source of strength for his family. His people have enough to eat and their activities are protected. People use the names of the "ozo" men as they travel around. The "ozo" man himself is happy that he has grown to be a respected citizen of his town. It is an abomination to shed an "ozo" man's blood or to puncture his skin. "Ozo" people are given places of honor in town meetings, and they represent the town at important conferences. The "ozo" man's house is regarded as a house of protection in the town. One expects that an "ozo" man will not tell a lie. He will not say one thing one time and the opposite another time. This gives rise to the proverb, "A titled man does not say one thing to your face and another behind your back; neither does he vomit and then come back to eat it." As a way of honoring him, he will not be required to join in the manual labor of the town.

Future prospects for "ozo" title

On the morning of April 2, 1977, Radio Nigeria Enugu announced that four CMS church people had taken "ozo" in Ngwo in Udi Division. The source of the information was Mr. C. C. Onoo.

He explained that those people took the title by using money instead of the spirit-worshipping ceremonies, so that this title-taking did not contradict church law. By such tactics, "ozo," which used to require a long time for completion, can now be acquired in the twinkling of an eye. As a result, "ozo" title taking in the future will not be completed according to the dictates of tradition. It may also mean that church people will participate in other "ozo" activities such as masquerades, cutting "ichi" marks, marrying and doing various special dances. Some people think that it is important for church people to be allowed to take "ozo" because it is a buttress for traditions which white people want to eliminate.

"Ozo" is something with hidden significance. Only those who are in the group are well acquainted with their activities. But the church people among them will eventually take the title, but they will not do so if the "ozo" men will not eliminate the things concerning the spirits which are part of it. The church people have their laws too. If church law allows people to take "ozo" then that is their own affair. A person should remain in a position where he knows what he is doing.

12. PERFORMING MASQUERADE IN IGBO LAND

What is masquerade?

Masquerade in Igbo land is a secret society. Explaining what is involved in it is like the "ichi"-marked eye: you do not open it wide. Masquerade is like a goat which is without its owner's knowledge. It is a very strong tradition, practiced everywhere throughout the land. The people of Aguata, Olu, Enugwu, Udi, Oka and Nsuka call it "mmanwu." Those of Onicha and Asaba call it "mmofo," and those of Owere, Mbaise, Ngwa and Ohofia call it "ekpo."

There are two groups--the children's masquerade and the adults' masquerade. Within these two groups there are the dance masquerades and the noise masquerades, "ulaga," "okporiokpo," and "ekpo," which is for children. Among the adult masquerades are those who come out at night. Some of these are "ayaka," "achikwu" or "onyekurie," "ogbagu" and "okuekwe." They are all dance masquerades. There are also adult masquerades who come out in the afternoon. Some of these are "mgbadike," "ojionu" or "ogbamgbada," and "okwomma" of the Achina people; "izaga" of the Uli and Uguoba people; "ozaebili" of the Utu, Ukpọ and Osumenyi people; "icheoku" of the Aguata people; "enyi" of the Umoji people; "atu" of the Awo Idemili people; ~~and~~ "odudubariba" of the Aro; "ndizuogu" and

"ijere" of the Enugwu ukwu, Abagana and Umudioka people; "ekeleke" of the Ibi people in Oru Division; "okorosha" of the Owere people, and various other masquerades without names. Various nicknames are applied to masqueraders, such as "egwugwu" (masquerader), "asaa na asaa" (7 and 7), "eze nwanyi n'oru" (chief of women in work), "o si n'isi ahụ ụzọ" (he sees through the head), "igwe ka ala" (sky is greater than earth), "isi udele aba na ngiga" (the vulture's head enters the basket), and "mmuo na isi" (spirit and head). The masquerade is something to fear all over Igbo land. No one "fools around" with masqueraders because of their fearful customs. "The bird whose head is not hard does not go to the funeral of the woodpecker."

There are all sorts of masquerades. Some have four legs like the one at Awo Idemmili and the ram of the Uli people. Some have eight legs like the one at Nnewi. Some are very long, like "ijere," "ozaebili" and "izaga."

Masquerades are performed only by men, but not just any man can do it. Only those who have entered the masquerade group and learned about it can perform it. One must have reached a certain age or size in order to enter a masquerade group. When a man arrives at such a point, the rites involved in entering the masquerade will be performed for him. A young

man who has suffered through the trials involved in entering masquerade prays that never in his life will he have to undergo anything like this. All masquerade members are called "umunkwu mmanwu" (children of the oil palm masquerade). In Olu they are called "adukwu" (large, bitter kola nut). Those who do not know masquerading are called "ogbodu" (cowards). Nothing can induce an "ogbodu" to approach a place where there is a masquerade. He can stay inside his house to watch it. In some places, like Udi, an "ogbodu" does not come out to witness masquerades. Igbos say, "the masquerade's head frightens the 'ogbodu.'" A masquerader does not speak at the same time that an "ogbodu" speaks.

Donning of a masquerade costume

Putting on the masquerade outfit is a big thing to be done in any town where masquerade is performed. Only certain people can put on the costumes and only certain people can dance in them. Whether one person or a group put on the costume is determined by the type of masquerade they want to perform. Before any masquerade is performed the person or the group will make extensive preparations for it.

The day of the performance is an awesome one. So many different kinds of food are cooked, one cannot name them all, and wine is poured as freely as perspiration. The person or

the group performing the masquerade invited his friends and well-wishers to attend on that day. Masqueraders come in from other towns to perform. On performance day compounds and roads are filled with nothing but masqueraders. They will be coming out of the town of the performers and traveling to the location of the performance. When they reach it, food will have been cooked for them to welcome them to that town. After greeting them as guests of that town they and their newly built masquerade will be taken back to their town where food and drink await them. That day is one of nothing but feasting for them.

The performance of a masquerade is not something which can be done while wearing a faded, worn-looking loincloth. It is always the kind of situation where "if one does not wet his lips during harmattan it will be done for him," because "one tries to see that water is dammed up wherever it might leak." (Conveys the idea of closing every loophole.) Performing masquerade is like the child who, if he has the courage, will brush his hand over the python. Before performing a masquerade a native doctor will be called who will use his medicines and charms to protect the masquerade and prevent harm from coming to it. A diviner will also be consulted to find out what should be done so that no trouble should befall the masquerade performance. If some difficulty or stumbling-block

is foreseen, sacrifices will be performed to settle all these things before going ahead with the performance.

Some masquerades are masquerades of the spirits, and they come out only when the spirits owning them want them to come out. Masquerades like this and other very big masquerades like "ozaebili," "izaga," and "ojionu" are very active. The performance of adult masquerading requires a lot of time and money.

Times when masquerades are performed

Masquerading provides excitement in a village and enhances other activities. Because of this, masquerades usually come out during village celebrations. They are performed during funerals, during the invocation of spirits, at Christman, and when an important personage comes to town. Sometimes a spirit may desire a masquerade to be brought out for it. It is not just any masquerade which comes out for this. The type of masquerade one contacts for this will be the chief one active in the town.

In some small, developing towns, children perform "ekpo" every Sunday. This is to provide some diversion for the town.

Defiling a masquerade or breaking open a masquerade's head

In the old days, no one would ever attempt or even think of attempting to strike the head of a masquerade with any object, because this was considered an abomination. Therefore, the

judging of such a person is not postponed until dawn but rather he stays there and falls or runs down like rainfall-- let anyone who strikes the masquerade's head take any punishment which comes to him. As the Igbo proverb says, "The thing that a flutist plays is between him and his nose."

In all places where masquerades have been called out, there are certain common requirements in common to deal with a case of violation of a masquerade head. But towns may also differ from each other when the particular situation of a town dictates a different practice. Anyone who pulls off the head of a masquerade, or exposes it to view, or finds out what the inside of a masquerade looks like, has violated the head of the masquerade. This holds true everywhere that masquerades are performed. Other practices will vary according to the way the town wants them. For instance, in Olu and all the towns near it, a person does not even come near to a masquerade, let alone have a discussion with it.. Around Ihiala, Okija and other nearby towns, a person has no interaction at all with a masquerade. Once the masquerade has come out, it keeps on going until the time that it returns to its place of emergence. It is also this way around Anambra State, and it is very strong around Enu-Ani. In any area where masquerades are performed, especially "ebiri" or "uke" masquerades, it would be better for any violator if he had never been born, because the "ebiri" or "uke" people will fight him to the death.

The masquerades which children put on for dancing are not sacred. They can do whatever they like because the Igbos do not regard them as great masquerades. There are also names for the children's masquerades, such as Uлага or "okporiokpo" or "ekpo," as was explained earlier. Another thing taken to be a violation of the masquerade head occurs when a foolish person, that is, one who has not entered a masquerade group, mimics or mocks the masquerader and is noticed by the group. It will then be said that he has violated the masquerade head. Also, if such a person who is a non-member comes out to the place where masqueraders are meeting, it is said that he has defiled the masquerade. Masquerade violations are so numerous that counting them is like trying to count the legs of a millipede. The situation stands as each town wants it to stand. An Igbo proverb says, "One who passes a small stream throws in a ("akpara") or a hoe." Affairs relating to masquerading are like the stream -- one must throw a ("akpara") in it.

What is done to a person who violates a masquerade head?

In the old days, if anyone broke the head of a masquerader, the members of his group would run immediately, without speaking or (warning?), to the house of that person, carry away all his belongings and set his house afire; and there was no way that person could prosecute them. But now, as punishment for

such violation, strong, older masquerade members will come out, and younger ones will be seen everywhere, holding palm fronds in their hands, and some with their clubs or matchets. They will advance on the house of the person guilty of the violation, and they must be given anything which the people of that town have decided must be given. But if the offender stubbornly refuses, they will go and lay their hands on as many of the animals of the house as they want, and then leave. In some places they will take goats, chickens, cows, or money.

Is there something bad in performing masquerades?

Really, this is like digging out a poison which fills the body but denying the poison. Performing masquerade has brought sudden or accidental death to many a strong man, due to the extremely strong medicine prepared for it. Some people use it to retaliate against someone with whom they have had a falling out, when they have been unable to get the case settled. If the person wants to submit the case to judgment, he defiles the masquerade. He will mislead a lot of people, because they say that spirits own the masquerades and the spirits give them the special strength to do some of the amazing things they do. They make special medicines for themselves and for other people when they want to make people honor and respect them. Actually, there are not many bad things involved in it, but those that are involved are not such things as murder and seducing people's souls. But it can bring quarrels between one person and another, between brothers, quarters, and towns.

What then is good about performing masquerades?

Masquerades are used to show off physical prowess and to exercise the body, but in olden times such recreational activities were different from those of today. The masquerade had the final word in all cases in the old days, because after he had decided a case no one else would dare to offer another opinion.

Masquerades were employed in the levying of fines, and they provided some stimulation for the town. They also helped to keep the peace, because they acted as policemen in any town where masquerades took place. They were able to reduce the number of crimes such as thievery or sorcery by calling the name of the guilty party in the dark of night and telling him that it was public knowledge that the spirits had seen what he was doing and he had better stop immediately. The masquerade also was a beautiful spectacle to witness. Some masquerades showed signs of truly seeking to contribute to the welfare of the people.

What are our thoughts today concerning performance of masquerades?

As we have seen, there is both good and bad in it. Actually, it would be a good thing to keep masquerade performance alive, but remove from it everything having to do with charms, and remove the idea that spirits own it and mandate its occult aspects. Masquerades should come out not only when

a town has its own celebrations, but should also come out each time church people have theirs, so that the town will benefit from the stimulation. Judging from the exhibitions of traditions put on in Nigeria in 1977 by peoples from all over Africa, masquerade performances are customary all over the continent. It is like friends holding discussions while on their sleeping mats. It would therefore not be desirable to stop the practice altogether.

13. DEATH

What is death?

One thing there is which frightens men, women, older people, children, even young men and women in their prime. It terrifies them and causes their blood to run cold whenever they think about it or when it takes someone they love.

The Bible tells us that when God first created the world he did not put this thing into it. It goes on to say that it was when the earth's first man and woman committed a sin that got told them, "Dust thou art, to dust returneth." From that time on, that fellow (death) has been very tough--what he says, he does, and he is the strongest of the strong in this world. Anything in his grasp will get a taste of him if he can still see the road.

What can one say about it? It is death. Every living creature tries to run from it. But there comes a time when he has kept up that running to the point where his insignificant brain tells him that he has run a long time, and he begins to thank his little god for his life, forgetting all about death. But one who goes on a journey becomes sleepy; a runner must eventually stop running and go home; the traveler does not stay abroad. Anything which starts to dance must finish. The dog's food which is cold still awaits him. This means that sometime not far off, at a certain day and time you may

suddenly come upon that man lying on the ground with ants on his mouth, his nose and eyes dried out, his limbs stiff and straight like someone whose life will not last until daybreak, as though he would say that he had collected what had been given him to hold. The one who causes this is called by the Igbos "One who does as he pleases" or "One who kills a person when life is sweet to him."

Whenever a man or a woman does something for a long time, he or she remembers that it is only death that is able to keep him or her from reaching the goal; people like that, and women who frequently lose newborn babies, have given rise to the saying "If death permits me," or "Death please." If a person kills randomly in war and has been doing it violently for a long time takes people's skulls and uses them to drink water and wine from them, and takes the teeth of strong men to carry snuff for his nose, thus causing inexperienced (naive?) people to dub him "Death-defier," he is really causing them to be deceived. At times like this, the Igbos call him "Strong man," "One who looks death in the eye," "One who does not fear death," or "Death is fearsome." His nicknames are many; let us leave the matter with this question: at what point can it be said that a person has died?

That beautiful child now being held in the arms, that fine young man starting out on a journey--it is hard to believe that anything could harm them; that young woman whose waist is as slender as the leaves gathered by agriculturists, but who

is more beautiful than a flower, will have her day when she goes to sleep and does not awaken. On that day, she will stop breathing. At that time when it is seen that sleep has refused any discussion, remember that, as the elders have told us, it has turned into death. "Rain has beaten the cow in the eye." The time when it is said that a person has died is when he stops breathing completely for something like one night, and there is no longer any bodily movement.

Death consumes everyone--that handsome man or that fine-looking woman strutting around. The oil of life can spill out from their bodies at any time--just imagine it. If those other people who are following along behind them seem like people who "after eating we clean our hands on their heads," yet death will completely consume all of them. From the fetus in the womb to the crawling infant, to those who have grown into young men and women, and especially those who have become very old and withered--not one among them can be considered as food unacceptable for consumption by death.

In these pages we will consider the ways various groups of Igbo peoples bury their dead. We will take a look at the burial practices for children, for ne'er-do-wells, for young girls and mature women, mature men and people who have been titled leaders in ruling their land. Now "there is nothing to keep the dog from dying," or "the eagle for which the gun was loaded is now perched on the target."

Burial of a child in Igbo land

When we talk of the burial of a child here, it is necessary to explain that we refer to any person from the day of birth up to the age when he wears a loincloth or joins any dance group in his quarter. In modern terms, it is anyone from the day of birth until he enters kindergarten, or even up until the time he finishes secondary school.

Although no Igbo who was given a choice between life and death could be expected to choose death, still Igbos regard it as a bad thing for someone to die in childhood, almost as though that person deliberately chose to die. This is caused by the belief that it is a person's duty to take care of the burials of his parents. A death like this is a blow to the parents, especially if they have raised the child to the point where it could be expected that he would be a big help to them. But death does not follow the wishes of human beings. No one can argue with death--it has no limits.

If a couple has a child who dies before he is old enough to walk, to wear a loincloth or to go to school, in modern times the type of funeral he will be given will vary in different sections of Igbo land. In the old days in places like Umuahia, Ngwa, Okigwe and others, they would not buy a coffin but would use a mat, woven palm branches, or the child's loincloth, wrap the body in it, take it to the back of the house or the forest or any other designated place, and then bury it there.

They do not drink wine there, nor do they watch over the child's body for the night. Often it is the relatives or neighbors who do the burying. One thing found all over Igbo land is that a child's body is not buried in front of the compound. The tradition is that only the owner of the compound is buried in front of the house so that he can stay there and watch over his children. The Imerienwe people who live in Owere, and the Abakaleke will put the child's body in a pot for burial; however, if it is young enough so that it has not begun to walk, it will be thrown into the "bad bush" and will not be buried in the ground.

If the death occurs in a place like Olu, after burying the child's body the relatives will remain at the home for one night for something called "mwusa ala" (pouring out for the earth?). During this time each person will buy himself a pot of wine to drink there. After this, the women will take two small pots, put ashes in one and water in the other, and carry them out to the path, where the bereaved parents will use the ashes and water for scrubbing their hands. This is called "washing hands of the child in the path." A strong man does not do this. An indication of how bad this washing hands in the path is taken to be is in the fact that it is a curse when a person tells another, "I am going to wash my hands of you in the path."

In places like Umuahia, Olu and others, different burial practices occur if it is discovered that the child was an "ogbanje." (See Chapter 5.) Some people around Umuahia place an oil bean seed inside of whatever container they use to hold the dead body. They believe that this will cause the child to emerge forcefully from its grave in the same way that an oil bean seed explodes. In some other places such a body would be cut up with a knife, or burned in a fire. The Ngwa people do not follow such a practice. The Olu people burn the child's corpse in a clay pot, then take sand and dust and stuff it into the mouth and go and throw it into the forest. The Udi people do not do this. In Mbaise, if the child was old enough to have joined a dance group, then the members of his group will come and perform a dance on his behalf in front of his father's compound. They say that they do this because they believe that if they fail to do it the child has power to change into a rat and come and chew up their dancing equipment. One thing to note is that this dance is not accompanied by drumming.

In some sections of Ogwu an ogbanje child is not buried without first being marked with a knife in the lower abdomen as a sign of the parents' anger that the child did not choose to persevere in this world to which he came. In places like Utu, which is in Nnewi, and places surrounding it, they just carry such a child away and bury it, without making knife cuts

or placing it in a pot. One tradition found everywhere in Igbo land is that mourning clothes are not worn for the death of a child, nor is a funeral performed as for a full-grown man. They do not carry or drag the body; and only the parents or brothers and sisters of the deceased child can shave their heads in mourning, although there is no law against it.

Igbos say that all heads are equal, but some heads have more brains than others! All deaths are the same, but some are more heartbreaking than others. These are referred to as "corpse of tears" or "sudden death." For example, if a child is born, educated through elementary and secondary schools, finishes his examinations, and then dies, this is called a "corpse of tears." Even if the child had lived long enough to work in the town for perhaps one year, it still must be called a "corpse of tears."

It is true that a child like this is physically mature, yet the family will be too distressed to spend money on food and wine for the funeral guests. A death like this makes people speak out of emotional upset. One cannot imagine the great grief in the family of a child who dies under these circumstances. We don't know whether it is because of the money they have spent on him, or the care they were taking of him before death cut him off like a premature yam shoot.

The parents in such a case see themselves as people who "wash their hands to crack a palm kernel for a chicken."

They feel as though they have gone to the land of the spirits to fetch fire, brought it to the land of humans, and then it has gone out. Everyone alive prays to his god that he will not have to face a catastrophe like this.

If something like this happens in Umuahia, people do not expect the family to provide wine and other things. But if they have the means and they bring out such provisions, those with hungry mouths will always agree to eat, because the living must eat. But as it is said, what some tribes avoid, others will eat. If Ekwensu (Satan, or god of trouble) tries to stir up trouble on this account in places like Ngwa, Olu, and Owere, no one will pay any attention to him because they believe that "one does not tell a circumciser to go home because the child has died." They will be singing and drinking wine.

Burial of a ne'er-do-well

The Igbos call a "ne'er-do-well" any man who is unable to support himself yet dreams of marrying a woman whom he must feed. Sometimes such a person is not strong enough to work. Some of them are strong enough but unfortunately do not have the common sense to save money for the things they want. People like this would know better than to try to

speaking out in meetings of their age groups. Even if they persisted, no one would listen to them. Nobody knows what causes a human being to behave like this, bring shame to all his relatives. No one can explain "how this water manages to enter the tube of the pumpkin leaf stalk." In order to avoid being tainted with the name of "fool," the relatives, especially the brothers or half-brothers, will be determined to go and procure a wife for the ne'er-do-well, for it is said that "a madman feels no shame but his relatives do." If poverty strikes, it is not a disgrace. This has given rise to the saying that what is lacking to a fool is lacking also to his relatives, and there is nothing they can do about it. They will take the world as it comes. The people of Umuhia and Owere call such a person "onye ihoriho;" those of Aguata, Olu and Old Onicha Province call him "ofeke." The Ngwa people call him "onye iberibe." If the person persists in his foolishness his own god will look out for him; he will receive a different type of burial in Igbo land.

Only if the ne'er-do-well has inherited something which can be sold for burial money will his corpse be treated well (will at least have the millipedes removed). In Umuhia and other places, the brother who inherits his belongings is the one who will make an effort to get him buried. In some places, the brothers will share the burial duties and then divide his belongings among themselves.

The people of Abakaleke in Anambra State will carry the body of such a person and throw it into the forest. They do not bury it, but they take a hoe and dig up some sand, place it on his chest, and then return to their gods. The people of Mbaise do not enter a house where the corpse of a ne'er-do-well lies, unless they have a chicken in their hands. They enter the house, then kill the chicken, and afterward anyone else who wants to can enter and view the body. If this ritual is not carried out the body will not be carried outside for burial. In Mbaise they tell the story of a certain man who remained a ne'er-do-well until his death. They say that his brothers carried the body outside, laid it face down on the ground, and proceeded to flog it 48 times so that its ears would hear and would advise the living that their corpses would suffer a similar fate if they died such a death. A certain resident of Amandugba, which is in Olu, testified that people there talked of the flogging the corpse of a ne'er-do-well, but said that he had not actually seen it done. The people of Udi kill a chicken for such a person, and tell the hand that carried it to go and bury him in the wilderness. There are no other methods of handling the burial of such a person. In Ngwa the relatives manage to get him buried but he does not get a funeral such as is given to the head of the household. The people of Imerienwe, which is in Owere, kill a dog for such a

person, which they call "dog's eye." The Mbaise people call this "dog under the house." Neither of these two areas follows the practice of throwing dog's blood into the eyes of the body. The people around Owere whom we have mentioned take the dog to market and rather than killing it outright they beat it to death, take its body to the house where the ne'er-do-well has died, cook it and eat it. In Olu, Nnewi, Ogwu and Udi they do not do all these things. In Olu the parents of the ne'er-do-well will go and wash their hands of him in the path, as is done for the death of a child.

These customs held sway in various parts of Igbo land in the old days. But today, new ways have taken hold. Changes have occurred because of enlightenment, going to church, and possessing money. Coffins are now used everywhere in Igbo land for the burial of children. Enlightenment and knowledge have ended the practice of placing the child's body in a pot and throwing it out. The body of a ne'er-do-well is no longer an object of humiliation, especially if he had been a church member, because if he had attended church and tried his best to do church work, the other members will try to see that they come to pay their last respects and give him a good funeral.

As I see it, there is no point in treating any corpse badly, because no one person is exactly like all others in his desires. But "if a man passes gas without any smell he will not be accused of having licked 'ogiri' (seed of castor oil plant)." A person falls where his god has placed him.

The world is not perfect. Not all men grow old. Not all men become wealthy.

Death of a young woman

Death makes no distinction among children, teen-agers or old people. It is a cause of great anguish when a young woman who is mature enough to marry or who has already married is cut down suddenly by death. It is no small thing to a person to see the life of his own flesh and blood wasted.

When a young single woman dies, it is the duty of her family to bury her. No special honor is accorded her. Her father, or if he is not there some older man close to him, will delegate a messenger to call the men of the compound and the other brothers and tell them that bad luck has befallen them. In some places, according to local custom, he will give them four kola nuts, one keg of wine, and a cock. They will also send out a few young men to inform all their relatives in other areas, the inlaws, and the kith and kin associated with the girl's parents, wherever they may live.

In several places such as Ngwa, Mbaise, Owere, Mbanjo, Isiagu and Nnewi, the mother and her sisters will untie (unbraid?) their hair and make it look disarranged. All of them, along with her brothers and her mother (grandmother of the deceased?) do not think of washing their faces, much less bathing their bodies or combing their hair, from the time of the girl's death until her body is placed in the earth.

If it is a place where they have age group associations, her age-mates all will be spending the night with the body, chanting and singing praise songs all night long. In some places, the female relatives of the deceased girl's mother will come to stay with the mother. These people will be given kola nut, wine, and chickens so that they can stay awake.

At dawn the family will try to bring together everything needed for burial, such as cloth, woven mat or palm branches for wrapping the body, and then they go and bury it. Today boxes or coffins are being used instead of the woven mat.

If the deceased had been married, then everything concerning her death and burial is the responsibility of her husband's family. The husband of the deceased and a few of his brothers will take four kola nuts, a pot of wine, and some money, and go to the house of his inlaws to tell them that the day has brought them an unexpected event. The amount of money they will take is dictated by the custom of the town, because "each town sings with its own voice." In Ngwa, for instance, it will be only 14 kobo. This type of journey is called "iga ncho." After they have related the details of the unfortunate event, such as how they recognized the illness and how they tried hard to prevent the tragedy, the inlaws will tell them to return home and they (the inlaws) will be coming. After they leave, the inlaws will resort to divination to

find out "how the water was able to enter the tube of the pumpkin leaf stalk." Their chief aim usually is to find out whether the woman died a natural death or whether some enemy killed her. If their findings are satisfactory they will delegate a few young men to go to the inlaw's house to view the body and lay it out. But if the divination reveals the hand of an enemy, it gives rise to very bad feelings. It can create countless quarrels between them and their inlaws. They can make the inlaws suffer, because they might refuse to go and view the corpse for as long as four days, by which time it will have begun to smell. Not even in an excessive state of drunkenness could they be induced to venture out to bury the body of their daughter without having first looked it over and ascertained the proper burial rites. This type of trouble usually erupts whenever the death is not caused by illness.

In the husband's home area his people, the dead woman's age group, and the women of the husband's family will watch over the body from the time the evening meal is finished until daylight the following morning. This is called "nche abali" (night watch). Other terms are "ura ozu" and "ikwa abali." If there is no misunderstanding between the husband and the inlaws, the latter will come and join the "wake." The husband will give them kola nut, wine, chicken or goat---

whatever he can afford. Yam will also be cooked for them to eat on that night. The people attending the wake will be livening up the place with singing and noise-making.

When the inlaws arrive, a bit of money will be given to them before they agree to enter the place where the body has been laid out. After they complete their inspection and see that there is nothing suspicious about her death, they will lay her out and provide a costume for her to wear. In places like Okuma, if the young woman has not borne a child a mark will be made on her lower abdomen which will cause her to be able to bear a child when she returns to the world.

The first step in preparation of the body is the bathing. Two or three strong women will take it out behind the house and bathe it in very hot water. Then they will put a wrapper on it, using whatever cloth the husband has purchased for the purpose. If she has borne a child, they will use the remainder of the water that was used to wash the corpse, to wash the feet of her children. They do this in Ngwa territory to prevent the deceased from coming to call her children. Also in some places they use a small piece of cloth belonging to the deceased to drape around her neck or to wrap around her hand or foot.

In several places like around Nnewi, Mbaise, Ngwa and Mbano, they carry the woman's corpse to the land of her birth

if she is childless, or has small children, or if her children have died. But if her husband wants her to be buried in his house he will take care of all the things that have to be done. He will point out the spot where her brothers are to dig the grave to bury her.

If it is a town where the body is carried, some young men will be summoned for the purpose. The husband will give them one bundle of "George cloth" to carry the body in, and will also do other traditional things such as providing kola, wine, soap and a bit of money. People will sing songs of their district as they follow along behind the body. The deceased woman's husband, brothers, and the women of the husband's family will join the procession to go and see the place where she will be buried. In places like Oduma, a childless woman will be buried in the forest. In Ozubulu the husband's people will carry the body outside to the path before the people of her own area carry it away. They do not come through the gate of the compound, but will knock down a wall of the compound and carry her through that way.

Burial of an older woman

The funeral of an older, mature woman is different from that of a young woman. She is given special honor, according to her station in life. If during her lifetime she was a strong woman who conferred titles on the women

of that area, or if her children are powerful, she receives a burial different from that of those who were so poor that they could not find enough to eat. Such a woman will get a fine burial from her children, so that people will be shaking hands and congratulating them after the funeral. Many times a mature woman will give her children instructions about her burial while she is still alive or when she sees that she has begun to suffer the onset of death. When word like this is out, the children will "use their tongues to count their teeth" and will start their preparations early, because "rainy season in the sixth month does not come unexpectedly". If the woman is sick before she dies, her children (or her husband, if he is still alive) will send a message to the people of her native home, informing them that she is not well. This is usually done when she is struggling with death. After she dies the children will call all the relatives and household members and tell them that darkness has fallen on them. They will do for these relatives all the traditional things concerned with death. In some places it is the oldest person in the compound who calls the relatives. They will consult with each other and select a few people as messengers to go and tell her children and her own relatives as well as her husband's relatives that "the tiger's leg has given way." In places like Ngwa, Mbaise,

Owere and Umuahia, they also carry money on this journey. There is no set amount required--rather, the amount of money taken on this journey depends on the wealth of the inlaw and his wife. This journey made to carry the news of the death is called "iga ncho." The inlaws, on the return journey (to the home of the deceased) can be expected to take with them twice the amount of money, or more, as was brought for the "iga ncho." The amount of money which the eldest daughter's husband is expected to provide for "iga ncho" is greater than all the others. They will stay there, telling the inlaws everything they are planning to do when they come to bury their daughter.

Also at that same time, the oldest sister and brother of the deceased woman and a few of her half-brothers who can speak loud and clear will go to their maternal relatives to tell them that a tragedy has occurred (what fell to the earth has been mixed with sand). When they arrive they will go to the house of the oldest person in the compound. It is then his duty to call a few of his brothers who are at home and tell them that they have guests. These "ncho" guests will take four kola nuts, kola pepper, a keg of wine, and the money received for "ncho" and give them to the householders. Many times, the money used for "ncho" will be a few coins that they and their maternal relatives have decided on, depending on how much they happen to have. In Ngwa the "ncho" money is usually 14 kobo,

but this is not a hard and fast rule. That oldest sister and brother who have gone on the "ncho" trip will not sit down on a chair during the entire visit. This is the first signal to the householders that the trip they are making is not just a pleasant stroll. Another thing demonstrating their serious purpose is that they have purposely tousled their hair and have tied special cloths around their waists. If any older person sits in a chair when he comes for the purpose of "ncho," his mother's relatives say that he is enjoying his mother's death (literally, "drinking his mother"). They will penalize him by requiring a pot of wine from him before they will speak to him. This is not done in anger, but is a way of collecting money. Many times, people will carefully avoid sitting in a chair and will go and sit on the ground, in order to show that they are prepared to "do their mother proud" (literally, "wash their mother's face") and that "there is something in the herbalist's bag."
(Does this mean that they are wealthy?)

It is also during this journey that the maternal relatives will spell out everything which will be required for their "mother's" funeral. This is called "igu ogugu ozu" (literally, to count out things pertaining to the corpse). They will come to agreement on what they will do or will promise to do in the future. Just as each town does things

in its own way, so this enumeration of funeral requirements is done differently in each town. The items required might be cows, goats, chickens, or money, according to traditions and to the wealth of those making the arrangements.

In places like Udi and Ngwoo, this "iga ncho" custom is a bit different. There, it is the elder in the compound where the woman lived with her husband who travels to the home of the elder of the woman's family of birth, to tell him that his relative has died. He gives him only 2 kọbọ and tells him that he has finished paying his debt to him. They say that this is the final debt involved in marrying a woman. Those receiving the "ncho" message will tell the messengers to return home, and they they will be coming. Since the deceased was an older woman, many times they will not waste time saying that they should go to an oracle to find out the cause of her death ("how the water entered the tube of the pumpkin leaf stalk"). They will send some people to return with the messengers and lay (stretch) out the body. When they arrive, they are given money before they enter the house where the body has been placed. After they have stretched out the body, they tell the children to come and begin the dressing of it. In many places, it is the duty of her children to see that she is stretched out at the time she dies, without waiting for her relatives' arrival.

While these things are going on, the children have a meeting to decide how to give their mother a widely publicized funeral, because it is said that "where many people urinate together there is a lot of foam". They will begin promptly to do the dressing of the body. If it were back in the old days, they would dry the corpse so that it would not begin to decay before they were ready to bury it. In places like Ngwa and Mbaise, the husband of the eldest daughter purchases the woven mat for wrapping and tying the body, or the coffin. He will also buy two lengths of "George cloth," one keg of wine, one goat, provide money and hire special dancers. Her other daughters will also buy two lengths of "George cloth," one keg of wine, and provide money as they are instructed. It is usually the oldest daughter who bears the burden of responsibility for her mother's corpse. But if the oldest daughter does not have enough wealth, her sisters who do have the means, or all of them together including the brothers will all contribute the things necessary for their mother's burial, so that there will be no cause for criticism of it. The Igbos say that anyone who has the means should bury his father, because it was not the oldest son who killed him. In several places such as Owere, Oduma, Nnewi, Mbanjo, Isiagu and various others, burial duties are not assigned to certain people,

but rather each one puts money in a basket until it is full. However, they do insist that each daughter provide a wrapper of "George cloth" to cover her mother, even if she does not have the money to buy it and has to go and borrow it.

Beginning from the evening of the day the mother dies, the female married relatives will come and hold a "wake." They will tell their respective groups of relatives to attend. Every woman who hears that her relative has died will drop whatever she is doing and travel to that place. It is amazing what the women do around a place where a death has occurred. It is like an honor for them--especially if it is a place where there is a lot of food. This is very bad around Owere. The women catch and kill chickens and other small domestic animals they find around the place. They rush to consume any food they see, like cocoanut, bananas, plantains, oranges, corn and fruits which are in the compound there, regardless of who owns them. Nothing is done to stop them. In fact, many times they are given money to keep them from pilfering people's property. These women also make various accusations. They might lay hold of the daughters-in-law of the deceased woman and say that they are going to beat them to death because it was their failure to take care of their mother-in-law that caused her to die. They might drag out her young sons or grandchildren and say that it was

because they refused to mend her house that the rains came in and drenched their "sister." They make various unjust accusations against people. Anyone they treat like this will not be forgiven unless they are paid a fine which they levy, which might be in money or in wine. This sort of thing is not found among the customs observed by the women's daughters individually. Before they eat the food given to them, they will seek out someone to accuse and will stare him down.

Some of the things involved in this tradition are kola nut, chickens or goats to use in cooking the food or the yam which will be eaten each night. In Owere, palm kernels and corn will be among the things given to them. Sometimes money is used for some of these requirements.

It is true that these married women behave like vultures descending on a corpse, but they do keep a death scene lively! They sing various songs in which they mention the deceased. They can use her name to create a song and to relate her deeds. They also make amusing speeches. These things provide a bit of relief for people's heavy hearts. They keep this up until the body is buried.

It is not only the married relatives who keep the "wake." The female friends of the deceased also join in watching over her body. They will be contributing to the commotion too. They too will be given something to keep sleep away, because

"one does not hold a wake emptyhanded." They also perform services such as fetching water, gathering firewood, and cooking food for the guests. In some places they each contribute one dish of food and bring it to the home of the bereaved family. If the deceased had been a member of some group or had taken various titles, her fellow members all will come to attend the wake and pay respect to her according to the group's tradition.

It is said that "whatever concerns the nose concerns the eye." The friends, relatives and inlaws of the people whose mother has died will be bringing them wine or kola nuts which they will give to their guests, because they know that "the head with crawcraw uses a lot of oil."

On the day the woman is buried the people from her native area will come. They will be given all the things that were listed in the funeral arrangements. Around Owere they would be given four goats. One is to be beaten to death, one is a gift from the compound, one is (ikwa ihu) to prepare for the future, and one for the road (to take home with them?). This "goat for the road" seems to be a universal custom among Igbos. It is used as payment for the goat the woman's family gave her when she was first married. In many places such as Ngwa, Mbaise, Isiagu and others, cocks are used instead of some of the goats, or an amount of money equaling the worth of the animals is given instead. Also, if those conducting

the funeral have the means, they can buy a cow to give in place of all four of the goats. It would be a source of pride to them if they could manage to do that.

If custom dictates that the body is to be transported, the owners of the body (refers to the woman's parents and members of her father's family) will take these domestic animals with them when they take the body home. If the body is not to be transported, the body of that aforementioned cow will represent the body of their relative, and it will be said that they have "carried their mother home." There are no funereal duties remaining once the woman's relatives have been given a cow. In Oduma, they will kill a cow and a horse, according to their means. This will not prevent them from supplying one goat which the deceased woman's children will kill by hand. If they are not wealthy, they will do as much as they can, because "the small bird bleeds according to his size." They will promised to do the remaining things at a later time. This can be at the time they actually bury their mother. In a case where the people are not totally lost in grief during the year of their loss, their mother's relatives will take whatever things they find, because "gathering wealth and eating have no end." They will give permission for her to be buried.

Before the body is buried, it will be well dressed. Water will be heated until it is very hot, and two or three

of the eldest female relatives will use it to bathe the body. They will anoint it with pomade or rub it with camwood, then will take all the cloths brought by her children and dress her beautifully. During former days when tree bark or woven mats were used, men would come then and tie up the body. But these days they would put it in a coffin and nail on the lid. Before the burial all of the deceased woman's children, along with any of her grandchildren who have the stomach for it, will come and take a last look at her.

In a place where the body is not transported, the children will say where their mother should be buried. In places like Isiagu, which is in Achina, they bury the person in a small house called "ngwuru," or else they dig a hole in the ground inside of her house and bury her there. If it is a town which has a special place for burying bodies (a cemetery), they will go there and look for a good spot to bury her. But in some places they use any clear space they can find, except in the path outside the compound.

In a place where they transport the body, some young men, who will be given certain things according to custom, such as a keg of wine or a fowl, will carry the body, with the married women accompanying the procession at the rear, singing softly. The husband's people and those of her own age group, even church people, join the singing procession

and stay with it until after the burial. The local people have the task of deciding where she will be buried and of digging the grave. It can be in the compound, or a place from which they had moved earlier, or a place which the local people have set aside for burials. After they finish burying the body, the people who transported it will be given wine, kola nut, and other things they may be able to provide. Now her children will be able to bathe. In Mbaise, her children will stay there with their mother's relatives and bathe and eat some food before leaving for home. Also after the burial the children will shave their heads as a sign of mourning.

Performing the funeral rites for a woman

If people whose mother has died do not have the wherewithal to complete everything involved in a funeral at the actual time of death, they will wait until such time as they do have the money, because "the ram backs up before butting." "One who does things as he is able is better than a thief." It may take them several years before they can perform the funeral rites for their mother. When they are ready, or when their mother has prodded them by means of divination, they will inform their maternal and paternal relatives that the time has come when "he who killed the leopard is coming to the market." They will take wine and go to their mother's

to ascertain what needs to be done to perform the funeral rites. They will also inquire about what must be done for the kindred. Things used for funeral rites can be cows or horses as is the case around Oduma, or goats, fowl, kola nuts, wine, baskets of cocoyam and other produce which the women grow on their farms.

On the day that they plan to perform the ceremonies, they will prepare a great feast. There will be enough wine to kill yourself with, because everyone who loves them will bring them wine. They will summon various groups who dance for women's funerals. These dancers are usually female. In Ngwa the best known dance for funeral purposes is the "ukom." The family will kill chickens, goats, and a cow which has been specially chosen for the guests, and they will give a cow to their mother's relatives. All the people who participate in the burying of the mother will get a special share of every animal slaughtered, because it is on their account that they are slaughtered.

The next day the deceased woman's sister and female relatives will dress themselves beautifully; then they and the "ukom" dancers and the married women will go out to the market. This is called "market ceremony for funerals." People will give them money when they make noise. This market ceremony concludes the funeral rites for a woman.

Death of a mature man

We all know that death comes to everyone. Everyone who dies should be given a funeral and should be buried. "Not all fingers are equal in length." This means that funeral rites for a child are not the same as those for a young man, and those for a married woman are different from those for a young girl. Thus there is a way to perform the funeral rites for a mature man who is the head of a household. I shall review some of these customs.

If such a man dies it is a great loss because the support of his household has crumbled. His funeral requires a lot of money, so if the one responsible for the funeral is not well prepared for it, he will not fail to call his relatives and tell them what happened. The body will be buried that night, but there will also be a time appointed for the funeral rites. This is why, when a mature man dies, the people of his household are not allowed to cry because they do not know whether his funeral will be performed or not. If the funeral is to be performed right away, arrangements are begun soon after the person has stopped breathing. The family will meet together as soon as they are notified of what has happened, and then they come and advise the one responsible as to what should be done. The first thing is to go and have divination performed in order to find out what kind of

death the person died. The second thing is to go and buy a cow to be killed for the townspeople. The next thing is to notify the inlaws, kith and kin, maternal relatives of the deceased, and all others whom it is necessary to inform. If it is rainy season, they will go and see a rainmaker in order to have the rain held off on the day of the funeral. Noisemakers (gong-strikers, rattle shakers, and wailers) will be sought out. A trip will be made to the home of one who has "mkponala" (an earth-mounted gun, or cannon?) to arrange for gunfire on that day. All the married women will be sought out.

Because of the enormous amount of preparation required to perform funeral rites for a mature man, it is seldom possible to perform them immediately after the death. Around Ozubulu, Nnewi, Oraifite, Ukpọ and Ihembosi, if a mature man dies but his father's funeral has not yet been performed, you can be sure that the father's funeral will be performed before his own. This is why some funerals are performed as long as twenty years after death. A person who dies but has not had a funeral performed does not take his place with the spirits. This is why some funerals are initiated through the process of divination. It can happen that a person may not know when a certain relative died, but if he is informed through divination he will not fail to perform the rites for him.

The night before a funeral, loud cannon fire takes place, in order to notify people that there will be a great event the next day. At the crack of dawn on that day, the rites begin with something called "imesu ozu" (a loud outcry of mourning). A group of perhaps 20 people will come out to the beginning of the path leading from the deceased's house to the road, accompanied by drummers and shouters. At the first drumbeat, everyone starts shouting and wailing in his own way. The drummer will lead the procession of wailers and weepers.

When people hear this commotion they will begin to come early that morning to pay their respects to the bereaved family. Around Nnewi, Utu, Osumenyi, Ozubulu and some other towns they refer to this as the "early morning condolence trip." People take this opportunity to be of service in various ways. If the corpse is above ground, which means that it will be buried that same day, some of the people of the area who came on the early morning condolence trip will start the digging of the grave. Others will take palm fronds and fashion an enclosure where the family can sit protected from the sun. The Ozubulu people call this enclosure "mkpukpu" (covering). Others call it "ndo" (condolence). While these things are being done, the cannoneer is shooting off his early morning blasts. When the protective shelter

and the grave-digging are completed, the person or persons sponsoring the rites bring out kola nuts and wine for these early morning guests. After chewing the kola and drinking the wine, everyone disperses and goes to prepare for the afternoon ceremonies.

The relatives and neighbors use this time to go to market to buy wine and kola nuts for the guests who will be visiting their homes during the afternoon rites. Only men and children can go to market, for regulations prevent all women belonging to the clan of the deceased from going to the market for one week.

The cow which is going to be killed for the townspeople will be tethered in a place where the people can come and look it over. By the remarks the people make as they examine that cow, any guest will know whether or not that cow is adequate for its intended purpose. Anyone performing funeral rites for a mature man will try to buy a presentable cow so as not to disgrace himself.

The funeral sponsor must also try to provide food, wine and kola for those of the guests who must be invited to enter the house. The money which people donate to the sponsor of funeral rites is called "ego uni" by the people around Onicha, Ihiala, Olu, Nnewi, Oka, and others. In the case of those giving "ego uni," the sponsor of the funeral gives instructions

for them to be given kola nut only. In other cases, he will say that they should be given wine and food inside the house.

The inlaws arrive during the afternoon. If the deceased had married daughters, his funeral will cause a great stir because all the various families of inlaws will attend. The inlaws usually bring with them a cow, wine, and two wrappers (cloth). A person who does not have enough money to buy a cow may spend up to 20 naira or more to attend a funeral.

In some towns like Ozubulu, Okija and Ukpò, the money and the cloth will be fastened to a pole in such a way that they will be in public view, and then they will be carried along with the wine which is brought for the funeral of the inlaw. Sometimes they invite dancers or masqueraders, so that people will know when the inlaws are arriving. These people precede the others and deliver the funeral gifts to the sponsor of the rites. They are then shown to a place where they can stay and are provided with kola nut, food and wine.

As evening draws near, that cow which was bought for the townspeople will be killed, in the presence of all the funeral guests. Around Olù, the cow is not killed until the following day. The meat will be shared according to the order followed in that town. The people of each quarter (neighborhood? community?) will be given their shares;

the drummers, the rainmakers and the married daughters will also be given theirs. Those who divide the meat try very hard to see that there is enough to go around. Sometimes trouble occurs after the shares are given out. Anyone giving a funeral prays to God that no trouble like this will occur at his funeral ceremony. Crowds of people stay around the site of a funeral until well into the night. If the body has not yet been buried, it will be buried during that night. It is the mature adults who stay on to attend the interment.

The married women will remain at the funeral site for three days. On the night of that day of the funeral, the women go around the quarter singing songs. In Ozubulu they call this "ikpo oloo." At dawn, a custom is observed which is called "covering the grave" ("ikpochi ala ili"). The participants in this are usually the people of the quarter and the inlaws.

Each inlaw takes a keg of wine in each hand and goes to the grave-covering ceremony. This is a time when they can evaluate the ceremonies of the previous day, which often they have been unable to do before because of the crowds of people there. So on the grave-covering day the inlaws give their report and then are given whatever is due them.

In this type of funeral rite, every masquerader hired by the inlaws or the local family will receive one cock from

those who are putting on the funeral. They also bring them a keg of wine in each hand. It is this type of thing which, if omitted, would be reported by the inlaws on the day of the grave closing.

In the old days, a mature man would not be buried in a coffin--a mat would be used.

At the start of funeral rites for a mature man, his wife or wives will loosen their braids and tousle their hair. Two days after the ceremonies (have started? or have been completed?) their heads will be shaved. It is not just anyone who can do the head-shaving--it must be performed only by the eldest daughter of the widow, or a sister of the deceased man.

Seven weeks after the funeral, it is said that the deceased person's weeks have been completed. On that day the brothers, the people of the quarter, and the inlaws meet together to fulfill the remaining requirements of the funeral ceremonies. On that day, too, anyone who owed the deceased a debt will come forth and report it. If there should be anyone to whom the deceased owed a debt, he would not fail to come and tell how much money was owed him. If someone had given a piece of land to the deceased as security on a debt, he too would be sure to come and report it.

Those in the household of the people sponsoring the funeral rites have a duty to find some way to pay the debts their deceased relative owed, or to collect debts other people owed to him. If the deceased had small children, on that day (seven weeks after the rites) the relatives will decide how those children are going to be raised. They might appoint certain people to supervise their upbringing until they are fully grown.

Another significant custom is the "giving of a fowl." A young woman whose husband has died may take a fowl and give it to a certain brother of her husband whom she wants to marry her, which means that beginning from that day on, that person will take the place of her husband. Sometimes widowed women do not give anyone a fowl, but declare instead that they will stay with their children.

A widow stays in mourning for a year or more before putting aside her mourning clothes. After that she can start going to market, to work, and to town gatherings.

Burial and funeral rites for an "ozo" title-holder

If an "ozo" titled man dies around Olu, before anyone knows about his fellow "ozo" holders will first go there and a tapping? (conduct an inquiry?) over the body of their fellow member. What this means is that the chief "ozo" man will take four

small brooms (broom straws?) and tap all over the body with them. He will then tie the four brooms together and give them to the oldest son of the deceased. This will cause his father's "ozo" title to be perpetuated in him. At a later time, after the father's funeral rites are over, he will invite the "ozo" men and give them food and drink. At this feast they will take his father's "ozo" title and formally hand it over to the son. It is said that "the singers of a clan are found in the voice of the clan." In towns like Utu (in Nnewi), Ngwoo, and around Aguata, it was found that "ozo" holders did not come to view the corpse. Thus they did not conduct inquiries over the body.

In the old days, the body of an "ozo" titled man would be kept for four days before burial. During that time the titled men would consult a diviner to be told what to bury with the body. These days, too, a diviner will be asked to prepare a neutralizing medicine called "oruma." The diviner will divide this medicine into packets and bury the packets separately around the compound of the deceased. This medicine causes the funeral guests to restrain their behavior so that no violence should erupt during the ceremonies. Church people do not condone this sort of thing, because they ignore the native doctors, and spirits do not prepare poison. One of the packets will be placed on the chest of the dead body, to

keep it from being angry about anything. The diviner and some of the elders from the clan of the deceased will prepare two charms ("emu"). One will be placed on the road leading to the deceased man's compound. The other will be suspended from some high place. This "emu" serves the same purpose as the "oruma" medicine.

All this time that the body is above ground, all the titled men will stay around to perform the tasks necessary for the funeral rites. They will wrap themselves around with young palm fronds. An untitled man is not allowed to enter into their presence. Obviously, the corpse will begin to smell bad before it is time to bury it, but the titled men refused to spit or vomit in disgust. Any of them who shows signs of it will have to pay a substantial fine.

Plucking out a dog's eye → center

Around Olu and Oru, they will pluck out the eye of a dog to show that the deceased was a strong man during his lifetime, and that he will be strong again in the next world. They take a large, male dog and tie him to a tree. A very strong herbalist throws medicine in his eye (in such a way that) so that he will not bleed when his eyeball is plucked out. After the eyeball is plucked out, the dog will still be breathing. If he bleeds or dies while the eyeball is being

plucked out, it is believed that the deceased person will be displeased, and that would be disastrous for his family.

The herbalist will take the dog's eyeball and place it on top of the eye of the corpse. The grandchildren or some native sons of the place will then carry off the dog's carcass and butcher it. Around Nnewi it is a ram's eye that is used in this procedure. But people all over Olu have the custom of hanging a ram around the chest of the titled person's dead body to show that he was a strong man. This gave rise to the saying that "if a ram is not seen a strong man is not being buried." That ram will later be eaten by the maternal relatives. A goat's ear will be placed in the right hand of the corpse, and a chicken's wing in the left, in order to insure that the man will acquire wealth in the next world. His wives and daughters-in-law will go and buy a large (ogbe?) fish to be placed in the mouth of the corpse. The oldest daughter and the oldest son will roast yam, cocoyam, and other foodstuffs for him, so that he will be a farmer in the next world. The titled men will be given seven goats for use in removing the hands of the deceased from the chair.

At least one Igbo cow must be used in the funeral rites of a titled man, before he goes to the land of the spirits. That cow will be taken to the town's large market on behalf

of the deceased. A son of the land who has been selected by means of divination will tie a rope on the cow, lead it around the market four times, then take it back to the house. The titled men will butcher it and share the meat. But the cow will not be butchered on the day of the burial--this is a matter to be discussed afterward.

At the time of taking the cow to market, the oldest daughter of the deceased "oꝝo" man will put on her father's garment and cap, sling his bag over her shoulder, and go around wailing and calling her father's name, saying, "Oh my father, my father! 'Okoo m !'" While she is wailing like this, people will give her money. In the same way, the oldest son will take his cutting knife in his hand, tie a "George cloth" wrapper around his waist and circulate around the market crying, "Ogoo! Ogoo! Ogoo! 'Okoo m !' Ogoo ogoo! ogoo!" Money will rain down on him. On that day the market will be jammed with people. The inlaws, kith and kin, and friends from near and far will accompany the family of the deceased to the market. Entertainment such as dance groups and masqueraders will be wondrous to behold.

Burying the body of a titled man —————> *center*

From Olu up to Ihiala and Okija and surrounding towns, they do not send titled men to the land of the spirits in coffins or long boxes. A "cupboard box" is constructed, in which

the body will be in sitting position like a living person. Sons of the land will dig a grave inside of his room, or else they will start digging in the compound and tunnel through to his room. It is an Igbo taboo for rain to fall on the grave of a title person.

A titled man is buried at midnight, and in Olu no one is permitted to be present at the burial except his fellow titled men. They will lower the body into the grave by hand and then cover it with sand. Many conjurers attend such events, and only the titled men can know what goes on at such a time.

Drumming for the burial of a titled man → center

In all parts of Igbo land where "ozo" title is taken, various special types of drumming are performed when an important man returns to the spirits. In many towns in Olu and Oru, when the dog's eye is removed for the titled man's body, when the ram is placed on his chest, and/or when the body is placed in the grave, they perform a certain drum dance which some towns refer to as "ikoro." It also has other names such as "ogidi," "abia," "ekwe," and "ufie." The people of Ngwa and Mbaise call it "ese." The "ese" is performed not only for titled men, but for anyone who was a strong and brave person during his lifetime.

This type of dance is not done by a person whose father is still alive, nor by one who has not done great deeds. Neither does a woman perform it, even if she is a leader among other women. This dance accompanies a brave man to the land of the spirits. It will be performed by someone who has completed funeral rites for his father, who is a mature person who has proved himself as a man, and who is wise in the ways of this world. When he dances "ekwe," he will show through various types of body movements that he is a powerful man. The "ikoro" dance is accompanied by a flutist and a drummer of "ekwe" (wooden slit drum), as well as a singer. Nowadays it has gotten so that one who does not dance can sit and nod his head.

Other types of dancing used are "mmesuru" or "igba and odi." Anyone can do these two types.

Young men perform masquerades called "ayaka" and "achukwu." They are extremely powerful. They climb palm trees barehanded and break off palm branches with their hands and feet. They also do various kinds of conjuring.

At funerals, young men will sing shooting songs such as:

A nnye nnye a nnye

A nnye nnye a nnye

A male cow is buried a nnye

A giant is buried a nnye

A male cow has died a nnye

A giant is pursuing it a nnye

While the rites are being performed, young men will be chanting. They are the ones who do away with much of the food which is provided for such affairs. At a titled man's funeral everything is in a state of chaos (there is no ground remaining). Anyone who comes to the place will know that a strong man has departed from that compound. But while all these things are going on, the "oruma" medicine which was prepared before they started will keep people from getting hurt. During the chanting, songs are sung such as:

We (di ize) Ize
 We (di ize) Ize
 We are fearsome Ize
 We (di ize) Ize
 The town begins to receive
 the world. Ize
 We twist their mouths Ize
 The large towns begin to
 receive the world. Ize
 We twist their mouths Ize
 The leopard's eye is fearsome . Ize
 The town begins to be strong. . Ize
 We cut their hair Ize

When a titled man is buried, a cannon is shot off, as well as a gun which some Igbos call "kurutu." When the guns sound "bang, bang, boom," it means that the titled man is going to the spirit world.

What is done when a cow is killed

The cow is killed on the day following the burial.

"Ikoro" is drummed, the flutists play and the criers perform. Around Olu it will be the oldest son who applies the knife to the cow's neck. In Ubulu Ihejiofo it will be the chief son of the land who does it. In Aguata, the chief titled man will first touch the knife to the cow's body and then a young man who comes from the compound of the deceased will finish killing it. The titled men own the meat of that cow, but the person who owns the corpse will take the head, the skin, and everything that is in the stomach. The "cow children"--that is, the oldest daughters of men who have gone to the land of the spirits with the cow ceremony having been performed for them, will remain in the house of the deceased seven days, eating and drinking. Every night they will be going around the town singing noisily, receiving money and various other gifts from their relatives. Afterwards, the oldest son will place the skull of the cow in his father's "obi," where it will remain. The titled men will place a large "ekwe" drum in the "obi" of the deceased titled man, where it will stay for seven weeks. His oldest son will be beating it three times a day--early in the morning, in mid-afternoon, and during the evening. He will continue beating this drum until his father's funeral rites are completed.

Singing funeral songs

Before the body of the titled man is buried, his relatives and friends, other titled men, inlaws and all those who associated with the man when he was alive, his half brothers and full brothers, will take cows, goats, chickens, cloth and money and will then begin the ceremony of singing funeral songs. The one performing these songs brings whatever he is able to bring. But everyone who married a child of that titled man must take a large, fat cow or goat and wrap a piece of "George" cloth around its waist for the sake of the deceased. When the inlaws come to sing funeral songs, they and their brothers will be singing "gun songs," making a commotion to let people know that they are coming. Some people call it "ilo odike."

Whenever a singer of funeral songs reaches the place where the body lies, the family of the deceased will stay nearby to hear what he has to say, especially about the relationship he had with the deceased. If he is in debt to the deceased, or if there are any matters whatsoever standing between them, the singer will be sure to bring them out in his song. He will close by saying, "If the chicken becomes entangled, his neck will be twisted." (Meaning: "If I have stated anything falsely, let me be punished.")

Sometimes, the singer can kill a goat or a chicken which he holds while singing before the body, and then he takes it home with him. But many times the items used for these funeral songs will be retained by the dead man's family. When a person sings funeral songs, he is clearing himself of any possibility of blame for that person's death. He is also announcing that he, as a living person, has separated himself from the one who has died and they no longer have any dealings with each other. He sings, "Go your own way. I have gone mine. While you are going and coming, do not call me. Follow the one who caused your death. If I have stated anything falsely, let me be punished."

If there was some money matter between the singer and the deceased, he will speak out about it during the funeral song. The Igbos believe that people are unable to lie when they sing these funeral songs. They believe that anyone who lies about a dead person during his funeral song is surely courting his own death (wears his own death on his finger like a ring).

Mourning or sorrowing for a titled man

For seven weeks after the death of a titled man, his wife will remain in a state of mourning which the people around Olu call "ekwe mbiriba." "Ekwe mbiriba" are stripped midribs of raffia palm fronds. The wife will sit on them

and sleep on them for the entire seven weeks. During this time she will not greet anyone nor allow anyone to greet her. She will hold a small kitchen knife in her hand, and her food will be placed in a small broken clay plate. She must eat none of the food which was provided for her husband's funeral ceremony. She must also tousle her hair and wear ragged garments, and is expected to cry for her husband early every morning. In the old days, she would not bathe until the end of the seven weeks, but it is not like that these days.

When her seven-week mourning period is over, the married women will come and shave her head, and she will emerge from the "ekwe mbiriba." She will now begin to wear black mourning clothes and go around freely, to market, to the farm, to married women's meetings, and any other places she may need to go. In Abiriba, Ohafia and Oduma, in the vicinity of Ogwu, the widow shaves her head but does not wear any special mourning clothes. And in Olu and some other places, a woman whose head is shaved in mourning will not shave it again for one year. The children and the brothers of a titled man who dies will shave their heads at the time of his death and will also wear mourning clothes for one year.

At the end of one year, the people of the titled man's household will remove the mourning garments. On the night

before this happens, the daughters of the family and the wives of relatives will accompany the widow into the "bad bush" at midnight. There they will be put on attractive garments and then return to the house. Others who have been in mourning will burn their garments at home. This will be followed by a big feast to compensate for all the hardships of the past year. Anyone who is so inclined can give a gift to the woman who is coming out of the mourning period. Many people like to do this by way of consoling her.

14. GREETINGS AND SHOWING RESPECT IN IGBO LAND

Igbo people are kindly disposed toward their fellow men and they show it by greeting them. This is one of their ways of showing sincerity and pleasure in receiving people. If a person should fail or refuse to greet someone, it indicates that he has something against that person. Thus it can be discovered which people are angry with each other by observing their failure to greet each other.

Igbos have various greetings which they use at various times. Similarly, the greetings vary according to dialect.

Various greetings

Morning greetings

The Igbo saying that "morning greetings do not know an angry person" shows that morning greetings are very important to them. If a person sees his friend in the morning, they both try to greet each other at the same time. Many times, a younger person will greet an older person first. Again, it may be the one who sees his friend first. If a person wakes up from sleep and greets his friend but the friend does not answer, or mumbles his reply, that person will be angry because it is starting the day off with bad luck.

In a household, it is a wife's duty to greet her husband when she wakes up. Or it is the children's duty to greet

their parents and their elders. In places like Owere the morning greeting is "I bọọla chi?" In Mbaise it is "I teela?" The Ngwa people use "I bọọla chi?" or "Maazi," while the Ndoki and Asa people use "I saala chi?" In Abiriba and Ohafia they use "Kaa." Afikpo greets with "Nna." People around Onicha say "I putala (putago) ụla?" The person who is greeted like this will reply with something like "Aboọla m chi, i bokwara nke gi?" This is why Igbos say that greetings are like reincarnations--they go back and forth between people. If a person greets a guest or someone else not part of his household, it brings him good luck for the day.

Greetings on the road

In Igbo land it is traditional to greet someone along the road, even if he is a stranger. Often a younger person will greet an older person he meets on the road. If a person passes by his friend on the road or in the market without greeting him, the friend will call him back and ask, "When did you and I have this disagreement?" The first person will make amends by greeting his friend, begging his forgiveness, and explaining what caused the omission. If a child fails to greet his elder, that person will scold him and say that he is going to tell his parents to admonish him. Greetings given on the road may be "daalu," "nnọọ," "deeje," "i gawala," "gaanu" or "lo ngwa." The other person will answer the greeting and may also inquire about his household.

Greetings for one who does someone a kindness

People use greetings in gratitude for good deeds or gifts they have been given. A person receiving a gift may say "I meela," "ndeewo," "I meka," "mmamma," "daalu" or "diike soo," or "a nwuchula," according to his dialect. This is very important, because Igbos agree that "if you do a good deed for the one who cooks beans, she will cook them for you again."

Work greetings

Igbos are known for farm work. They believe that "if the hand does not till the earth, the mouth will not lick oil." They do not approve of a person sitting idly with his hands in his lap. They greet workers to show their approval of them, for they believe that if one greets a working person his strength returns. On seeing someone doing any kind of work a person may say, "jisie ike," "daalu olu," "deeme," "birima" or "diike oru." Sometimes if a person is not close to the place where the worker is, he will greet him by just waving his hand.

Greetings for age groups or clubs

Igbos have a way of gaining respect for themselves by forming age groups or entering clubs, whose members have their own ways of greeting each other. Some have nicknames used within their groups, such as "ogbuefi," "ogbuagu,"

"ekwueme," "onyirimba," or "dike." In some groups, the chiefs among them also have a special way of shaking hands; this may be done by the "okonko" chiefs, the "yam" chiefs, and those who have taken "ozo" title. They shake hands according to the positions they hold within their clubs. These people alone are permitted to use the nicknames of their fellow members or to shake hands in this special way.

Embracing and shaking hands

Igbos extend greetings to those who live in their area. They do this by inquiring about the household and the family. One method of greeting is embracing ("ibi oma"). If a person sees a friend, a brother, or anyone friendly to him, he may greet him by embracing him. It shows their happiness in seeing each other. This usually happens when they have not seen each other for a long time. More often than not it is women who do this, although it can be done by both men and women. Men and women who are siblings also can embrace each other. It is a greeting which may take place on the road, at the market, or in the house.

People may also greet their friends by shaking hands, to show their happiness and welcoming spirit. Igbos call it "chewing kola with the hand." Hand-shaking is usually done by men. If a man wants to shake hands with a woman he will offer his hand first. Also if an older person wants to greet a younger one he will offer his hand first.

Greetings for traveling

If a person is going on a journey he will say to his family and neighbors, "Let me go and let me return," "Let me travel," "I am about to go," "I am about to travel," or "All of you stay well." The person he greets will answer with, "Travel well," "Go well," "Good journey," "Return quickly," "Come back early," or "Go and return."

If someone who came to a person's house is going home, he will tell that person, "Let me go home," "I am about to leave," "Stay well," or "Let me come." The person will reply, "Go then," "Return well," or "Good journey."

Greetings for going to sleep

A person leaving for home after a nighttime visit at someone's house, or a person seeing his friend at night, will use a special greeting. He can tell him, "Let us break the night," or "Let dawn come." The person will reply with a similar greeting.

Greetings for mourners

Igbos are people who love each other. They show it by joining their friends in mourning when misfortunes such as injuries, trouble or death occur in their families. What is said to someone who has suffered something like this is, "Sorry," "(gwahu)," "(jaahu)," "(kara ọma)," "(tasie)," "have patience," "(kọọ)," "keep on trying," or "keep a strong heart." The person may reply with "Ndeewo" or "Mmama."

Respect

Igbos are people who respect each other, especially the older people, for it is said that honor is reciprocal, and if a person serves a chief, the chief will serve him. One who shows respect to an elder will not fail to receive respect from those younger than he.

Various ways of showing respect

A woman shows respect for her husband by being the first to greet him in the morning. Even if she goes out very early in the morning, as soon as she returns she will go to her husband's "obi" and greet him. Children show respect for their parents and all older people by greeting them. Everyone honors older people by taking the initiative in greeting them.

Women or children show respect for the head of the household by giving him something like the firstfruits of their gardens, such as bananas, kola nuts or pears. Also, if they kill any wild animal they will first show it to him, and he or some elder person of the household will be given the liver, the heart, and other choice parts of any animal they kill.

In some places a woman will go to do "orie" work for the head of the house. This is a day specially designated for working for him on his farm. Everyone will also give

his father or his elder all the raffia palm wine he has poured on "orie" day. This is called "pouring 'orie' wine."

A child does not go ahead of someone older than he in receiving his share of anything in the household or in his age group. A child also honors his elder by calling him "dede," "ndaa," or "dee" if he is a boy. If a girl, she can call him "daa," "danne" or "ndaa." If a special name is desired, honor and respect are shown by using something like "De Njoku." A child does not abuse the spirits of his elders or talk back when his elder is accusing him, scolding him or advising him. A person does not speak out at meetings of elders or of titled men. Neither does a person at an age group meeting tell someone to "shut up" so he can speak. In places where elders and titled men break kola, they are the only ones who should do it. In other places, an elder can give a child permission to do it. A woman does not present kola to a guest when her husband or some other man related to her husband is present, nor does she break kola at all when there is a man present. A woman does not sit down or use one hand when drinking wine. A child does not use one hand or only the left hand to drink wine when in the presence of someone older than he. In a polygynous household, the wives take shares in the order in which they were married. If a woman is seated when a man enters the house, she will get up and give him the seat. Women are shown respect by avoidance of the places where they are bathing or urinating.

In the household, the oldest son and daughter are shown special consideration. The eldest son is given the head of any animal killed in the household, and the eldest daughter is given its back. One does not use the left hand to give another person anything, especially if that person is older, unless he says, "Excuse my left hand."

The Igbos also honor prominent women, spirits and various gods through sacrifice, worship and various rituals. They also honor their ancestors by sacrificing to them and performing funeral rites for them.

The importance of greetings and demonstration of respect in Igbo life has diminished in modern times. The enlightenment of these days has resulted in people not greeting others as they ought to. It seems to have become too much trouble for people, especially children, to open their mouths to greet their elders. This is too bad. Igbos have abandoned their greetings for the English expressions. This is especially bad among those who are educated. If it is not stopped, the use of Igbo greetings will become a legend in the future. Women today do not believe in showing respect to their husbands when they drink wine. What is worse, many of them use their left hands to drink wine. They will have to be encouraged to preserve this honor and respect.

15. SOME UNUSUAL IGBO SAYINGS OR BELIEFS

Introductory remarks

Through the oral tales and the literature of countries all over the world it has been found that every group of people has its own unusual beliefs. If you come to Igbo land you will see that they are as numerous as grains of sand. Some of them pervade the entire Igbo territory. Of course the versions and the dialects used in describing them will differ. Elders are offended when educated people say that these beliefs are not valid. We will remember that in olden times they did not have this kind of disagreement. But this does not mean that all of these beliefs are necessarily strange. They are timeless and they exist all over the world. Fear causes some of them to persist even until today. In places where spirit-worship prevails many of them are still credited, especially those concerning household gods. The Hindus of India believe that the waters of the river Ganges have special powers. They do not kill cows. The Alakuba people do not eat pork or dog meat. The Bolobo of Zaire believe in witches and the power they can wield over human life. Some church people will not eat meat at certain times in their religious calendar. If a person picks off the threads in his garment he will find himself naked. It is only in a few areas of Igbo land that one can go all around and ask about some of these things.

We shall begin with those collected around Olu, Aguata, Owere, and surrounding towns.

Crying dog

If a dog stops barking and begins to cry, there will surely be a death in the household where this happens.

Breaking a palm kernel on the ground

If someone breaks a palm kernel on ordinary (open?) ground and eats it, he is inviting immediate death to his mother.

Breaking a pot of wine on the road

If a pot of wine is being carried to an important meeting and it falls on the road and breaks, the only smart thing to do is to go back home.

Bees flying around a person's head

This shows that guests bearing wine will come to visit such a person. Or that the winetapper has remembered him on that day.

A person seeing a bee at his home

This means that people will congregate at his house unexpectedly.

A person having a boil on his eye

It is said that such a person does not allow anyone to have even a little bit of anything he owns.

A child sitting on a stone

He will not grow any taller than he was before this happened.

Flogging someone with a broom a rope and similar things

The belief is that one who is flogged will look thin like the things used to flog him. Some will say that the "mouth" of the broom should be pointed toward the ground in order to prevent this type of thing from happening.

Stick used to measure a grave

If one fails to place this stick into the grave, or put in the rope used to lower in the coffin, trouble will dog people until this is done.

Twins

If you treat a small twin better than the big one there will be no trouble. But if you harm one of them, the other one will get angry and sometimes will suddenly die.

Performing a funeral for one who has died

If a deceased person does not have his funeral rites performed in the proper order, his family will not be able to rest. He will come from the land of the spirits and demand what is due him.

Animals owned by spirits

When animals believed to be owned by spirits are killed, the one who has done the deed can expect a fight (literally, "awaits the spirit with wrestling hands").

Night-grazing animals grazing in the afternoon

Any time a night-grazing animal comes out in the afternoon, it can be expected that something surprising will surely happen. Some people cannot bring themselves to do anything to these animals.

The following unusual beliefs are found in many parts of Igbo land

A person returning to the world

It is an Igbo belief that people who have died return to the world as newborn babies. Through a person's behavior, the one who has been reincarnated in him is recognized.

A person returning to the world as a spirit

"Umunadi" are bad spirits who bring trouble to the living. They afflict people at any time. When one man kills another by some underhanded means such as sorcery or poisoning, the dead person can return in spirit form to take revenge for what was done to him.

Early morning confrontation

Igbos believe that there are certain types of people or wild animals who, if they confront a person early in the morning, will influence the person's fortunes on that day.

Taking oaths

Belief in swearing oaths is widespread among Igbos. They believe that oaths are potent. A person who seeks to deny something of which he is accused is presented with an oath to swear. It is expected that if he committed the act, the oath will kill him.

Stubbing the toe on the road

Stubbing the toe while on the road can mean that the person's journey will turn out to be good or bad. Stubbing the right toe indicates that it will be good, but stubbing the left toe bodes ill.

A bird crying noisily

People call this bird by different names, according to the sound it makes. It does not come out regularly like other birds. Any time it cries, people believe that something bad will happen in that quarter before very long. Very often it will be someone's death.

A person sneezing

If a person sneezes it shows that someone in some other place is saying good things about him. If one sneezes while on a journey, it is said that someone in his household is talking about him.

Lightning

Igbos believe that lightning indicates the advent of thunder. They also believe that if thunder is about to sound and people say "kpan kpan kpan," then nothing will happen to them. They also believe that thunder sounds loudest in a place where something bad has been placed, such as a spot where "juju" medicine was buried in the earth, in a big tree or inside a house. Thunder can come and select a bad person from the midst of a group, kill him, and leave the others.

Sparks flaring around a pot while it is on the fire

In several places, people believe that if sparks flare around a pot which is on the fire, it means that the oil palm of the owner of the house is ripe.

Keeping away and inducing rainfall

Igbos believe that rainfall can be kept away or produced. Not everyone is able to do this. It is done only when necessary. Many times people with rainmaking power use it to harm others.

Practicing sorcery and mixing poisons

Igbos believe in these practices. The skills are possessed by native doctors or herbalists. Various kinds of charms exist. There are those which can drive a person out of his head or cause him to fall very ill, and there is one which has its own protection. This is why herbalists at masquerades will ask, "Do they say that there is protecting without sorcery?"

Outcasts ("Osu")

People in some parts of Igbo land believe in something called "osu." An "osu" is someone who has been dedicated to a spirit. The townspeople believe that anyone who does something bad to an "osu" does it to the spirit or deity (shrine?) to whom he is dedicated. That spirit will surely punish the offender.

Rabbits

The people of Nnewi and of Umuomumu Mbieri believe that anyone from their land who eats rabbit meat will surely have great trouble. They think that the rabbit saves them from their enemies.

Calling a snake by name at night

Many Igbos believe that if they call a snake by name at night, it will surely appear. Therefore they will refer to the snake at night by names such as "something long," or "rope of the earth."

Eyelids quivering

If the eyelids quiver, one of two things must happen. Either the person will witness some event, or there will be a death which will cause the person to cry.

Answering only one call

A person does not answer the first call of a voice because it might be the voice of a spirit. He should wait to be called two or three times before answering.

A pregnant woman watching a masquerade

A pregnant woman is not allowed to watch a masquerade because it is believed that she might bear a child whose face resembles the face of that masquerade.

Predicting the luck of the market

There are people who have good luck in the market and those who have bad luck. If a lucky person is the first to buy something from a vendor it is believed that he or she will sell a lot on that day. But if an unlucky person buys first, you can be sure that before very long the vendor will repack his or her equipment and go home as he or she came. This is why many vendors make their first sales at whatever price is offered, so they can start the day's transactions favorably.

One who travels back and forth ("Ogbanje")

Some people are only temporary sojourners on this earth ("ogbanje"). If such a person's buried "token" is not dug up, you know that he must die.

These unusual beliefs exist in many places in Igbo land, but they are unusually strong in places like the divisions of Udi, Owerre, Nsuka, and Ogwu. These beliefs are:

A baby's top teeth growing in first

People believe that if a baby's upper teeth come in before his lower teeth, it means that a bad child has come into the world. If there are older children in the house, they will die so that the one whose upper teeth grew in first can become the elder in the household.

✓ Millipedes in the house

Some Igbos believe that if a millipede enters the house it means that something bad is going to happen. The millipede will cause the death of some relative.

A vulture perching on the roof

○ If there has been no feast or any animal killed in a household but still a vulture comes and perches on the roof, it is a sign from the spirits to the household members that one of them is going to die.

Crescent moon appearing

Any time a new moon appears with an unusual shape, it is called a bad moon. Igbos believe that trouble and fatal illnesses will occur. They also believe that a popular person may die in that town before such a moon has disappeared.

A chicken hatching only one egg

○ If a chicken hatches only one out of all the eggs laid, it is considered a taboo. A fertile woman should not eat the meat of such a chicken or she will not become pregnant again.

Cock crowing at midnight

It is considered a taboo for a cock to crow at midnight. Such a chicken is believed to bring great trouble on the household owning it. Therefore it will be killed. The cooking will be done in a house where there are no children, and only the older men of the household will eat it.

Changing into animal form

The Igbos believe that a person can take on the form of an animal while he is still alive. This power usually lies with an older, well-known person. If an animal whose form is taken by that person is killed, especially if that person is a very old man, that man will die. This is why, in some places, if you see a wild animal run into the compound you would not hurry to kill it, because you would not know if there might be a sick elder who would die if the animal were killed.

Spirits

Igbos have a lot of different beliefs about spirits. They believe that there are both good and bad spirits, that the good ones help people to get along well in the world, and that the bad ones bring bad luck, disasters and all kinds of tribulations which are found in the world. They believe that the good spirits come from the creative force out of which the whole world was made.

If a person's saliva keeps dribbling (squirting?) from his mouth, especially when he wants to talk, Igbos believe that he will be eating meat within a few days.

Dribbling saliva

Not only bad things result from occurrences in the sky and on the earth. If a person should see a star moving from one place to another, it means good luck for him. According to this belief, the number of times he can count such star movements is the number of years he will live in addition to the span allotted by his personal god.

Flying (falling?) stars

There are various beliefs concerning rainbows. One is that if a rainbow appears it means that a titled man or an elder person will die. This is most significant if a long-awaited rainfall has not occurred, or if it happens in mid-afternoon.

Rainbows

Igbos believe that dead people, especially mothers and fathers, linger near the household where they used to live. This is why many Igbos keep a place in their households where they give food to their dead relatives. This is also why some of them bury their dead within the household, so that they and other spirits can communicate with each other and guard the household.

Lingering of the dead

There are various beliefs about dreams, some of which will send people to diviners to have sacrifices performed after experiencing the dreams. Some believe that a person who is chased by a wild animal in a dream is going to face some difficulty; and if a person acquires money in a dream, he is going to lose money.

Dreams

If a palm nut is cut off at the top of an oil palm tree and the head of that nut falls and breaks without touching anything, it is taken as a bad sign in the household where it happens. A fertile woman should not eat the seed or the oil extracted from it, because some believe that it could cause miscarriage. In order to prevent such miscarriages, the nut is abandoned and not carried inside the compound.

Head of palm nut breaking when it falls to the ground

Igbos in many places believe that if a pregnant woman steps over a soldier ant or a driver ant, she will give birth to a child who has a bald spot. This is why, when a child with a bald spot is born, people say that he "has the ant condition," which refers to the fact that his mother stepped over an ant.

Pregnant women stepping over soldier ants or driver ants

There is a belief that the people in a village are owned by deities. If a tree in a deity's shrine, especially a large tree, should fall, or if a branch of it breaks and falls, it could be a message from the spirits that someone popular in the village is going to die. This usually happens in the area of those who own the shrine.

Large, old trees

Igbos believe that if a wildcat defecates or cries out at the entrance to a person's compound, it means that the spirits have a bad message they want to send to the head of that house through the medium of a diviner.

Wildcats

Igbos believe that if a grave collapses and caves in, it means that the deceased wants to send a message to the household members. A diviner is consulted to find out why the grave collapsed. Many times the message the deceased person sends is not a benevolent one, but occasionally it will be a good one.

Graves

Many places in Igbo land "drive away death" every year. This is an end-of-year ceremony, which they believe must be done or else a contagious disease will fall upon the town.

Driving away death

Igbos believe, especially around Udi, Ögwu and Nsüka and other places, that a person who dies of an abdominal tumor commits an abomination or a taboo. The corpse of such a person is not carried out through the front door; rather a hole is cut in the back or side wall of the house, the body is carried through it, and is buried in the "bad bush." This is done so that bad things like that will not return to the household.

Abdominal growth (tumor)

In some places in Igbo land it is believed that if a person who is not a hunter shoots and kills a large wild animal such as a leopard, antelope or bushcow, he is killing his own heart or the heart of someone close to him. This means that he or his relative will die a sudden death unless he has a diviner perform a sacrifice to get a powerful spirit to intercede for him.

One who is not a hunter killing a large wild animal

Beliefs vary about the powers of spirits. A significant one is that anyone killed by a deity will have no rest in the land of the spirits. He will come out of the grave and hover around giving people trouble, and this will continue until his family do everything the deity says should be done or everything the deity desires.

Deities killing people

They believe that if a black person has a white spot on his body, that shows where burial sand touched the corpse of the one who is reincarnated in him. The same thing is indicated when a white person has a black area on his body.

Burial sand touching the corpse

are final. about the wealth he left behind. Their decisions in all cases opinion of a deceased person is when two people are quarrelling such as: (1) what causes people to die, and (2) what the

to ask the spirits about things which puzzle them, the living, Òhazara Division. Great numbers of people go to Nwòjì Nwanjì died dwell in Nwòjì Nwanjì, which is in Mgbalaeze Isu, in

It is believed that the spirits of all those who have

Beliefs about meeting spirits in this world

Ubulu Inejioto revere the python.

alive, and particularly upon its death. The people of the "aka" is accorded great respect and honor when it is people call it "guardian of the house." In places like this houses, just like domestic animals. This is why the Uburu kill an "aka." These snakes can be seen crawling around fertility of their land, and thus it is an abomination to

The Okposì people believe that the "aka" symbolizes the

Beliefs about the snake called "aka"

some of which are:

In Òhazara, they also have various surprising beliefs,

egg, wave it around his head, break it on the bridge as a sacrifice.
of this, anyone who has fallen off a bridge will take a chicken's
and

the top or side of a bridge, his bones will fracture. Because
They believe that when a person falls into the water from

Falling off a bridge

dangerous one.

means that the animal into which that person changes is a
They believe that if something like this happens, it

having the slightest hope of identifying it

Something overwhelming a person unexpectedly without the person

to keep women quiet in the evenings.

so that she may fail to become pregnant. This belief helps
women who are talkative at night and refuse to come near her,

into human beings. These spirits become very angry with
returning to the world enter the stomachs of women and change

They believe that evening is the time when spirits

Women being talkative in the evening

will cause his growth to be stunted.

They believe that to scold a child when he is eating

Scolding a child when he is eating

the palm kernel belonging to that shell.

body where it struck will be an abomination unless he chews
the shell strikes another person, that part of the person's

They believe that if someone breaks a palm kernel and

Palm kernel shell striking a person

In many places in Igbo land, there is a belief that if a person is confused by the "leaves of confusion," he will no longer know where he is going.

The leaves of confusion

They believe that a person can take another person and have him die in place of himself.

own head in death

A person using another person's head to exchange for his

will not grow any more.

This is believed to cause the thing to shrink and it

Pointing at a growing thing

Around Njikoka, there is a belief that there are certain trees which, if cut down, will cause a person to die.

Killing a person by cutting down a tree

In many different places in Igbo land they believe that a person can bite another person to death through witchcraft.

Witches

They believe that a person struck by an oil bean become ill with "white sickness" or leprosy if that oil bean

tree is not cut down.

Oil bean striking a person

In Igbo land many of these unusual beliefs persist. They may have deep meanings. It would be a good thing to review all of them to find out how firmly they stand, because day has dawned.