

AN EVALUATION OF THE URHOB0 CULTURAL CONCEPTION OF DEATH

Agbegbedia Oghenevwoke Anthony*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/og.v11i1.3>

Abstract

It is an undisputable fact that the preliterate Urhobo of Delta State in Nigeria and the continent of Africa in general, has been described as savages, irrational, illogical and primitive in their ways of life. Some Western scholars have even gone to the extent of disputing their rationality. However, one must ask: can man, who is created by God and endowed with reason, be at the same time irrational? It is for this purpose that we have to show that the traditional Urhobo man is rational, by using the traditional concept of death to discuss the general view of what death entails. The study made use of both primary and secondary sources to obtain the basic information. Findings revealed that, first; there is Urhobo culture and tradition, which exist in their own philosophy. Furthermore, the Urhobo believe in the concept of death and life after death. For the Urhobo, many have been born into this world and have passed beyond it to the other side of life. Nevertheless, this is not the case with those who have died and continued to live endlessly in the other side of life after death. Thus, it is necessary to view with utmost concern, the reality of that place towards all mortals are heading, if this world is, but ephemeral and a passage. One is therefore, advised to live according to dictates of good and moral life to inherit this abode after death, as conceived by the Urhobo.

Keywords: African tradition, conception of death, culture, immortality, Urhobo

Introduction

Every road leads to somewhere or to something. Every journey has a destination. Life is not an aimless undertaking; thus, like any other journey, it has a destination. However, the type or form of destination life is conceived to have, and will to a large extent,

determines one's basic attitude to life itself. For in daily life, the values and attitudes which people aspire to, and exhibit, are the direct expressions of their major belief (Ejizu, 1986:143). Hence, a people's worldview gives the direction along which life tends. This is also seen in the diverse works and interpretations of the concept of death by different scholars, which have led to sharp differences in their respective views.

It was Spinoza (cited in Mondin, 1985) who in his celebrated proposition of the Ethics notes that: *homo liber de nullareminus quam de morte cogitate; et eius sapientia non mortis, sed vitae meditation est* (of no other thing does man have less thought, than of death; his wisdom remains not in the meditation of death but of life). This proposition of one of the great fathers of philosophy and modern culture has become the law adopted by every human being in present times. The whole issue about death has become taboo, not only for social conversations, but also, for the serious meditations of philosophers and men of honour. This culture which is regarded as being rational and liberated, has destroyed the taboo which has rendered the sexual dimension of man unknown, only to have transferred the same type of taboo to the theme of death. According to Thomas (1982:14 quoted in Mondin, 1985:262), there exists a tacit understanding between the society of today and intellectuals. Nevertheless, if the whole idea of death remains a taboo for whosoever discusses or writes it, the phenomenon of death in fact, is too frequent, striking and too painful to be ignored. Death is something that touches the heart of every human being, creating voids which cannot be filled by any other thing; friends, parents, brothers, sisters, children, neighbours, dear ones and acquaintances are snatched away from us forever by this terrible thing. However and whenever it happens, one always asks certain questions such as: what is left of their being after death has occurred? Besides, what will become of us after we are struck by the same scourge?

Therefore, it is unavoidable for us to examine ourselves on our death and on the lot of our being after death. Quoting Pascal in his book, Mondin (1985:263) writes: what we are speaking of, is not

some unnecessary interest irrelevant to us, we are discussing ourselves. The immortality of the soul is something which regards us so strongly, something which touches us so profoundly, something that we need to completely lose our good sense to be indifferent to the knowledge of how things stand. All of our actions and thoughts must take very different directions, whether there is (or not) an eternal life to hope for, so that it is difficult to make a sensible and prudent choice without working from the solution of this problem, which refers to our final end. This implies that, man cannot escape from the research of the existential truth (the truth that ensures a sense for our present and future life).

In essence, since we are discussing about his primary interest, man finds himself before an undeniable duty; therefore, our first duty is first and foremost, inform ourselves on this argument, on which all our conduct relies.

Although, dead is a dreaded incidence, it is considered to be the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation, the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. Nevertheless, the major priority of life is to become an ancestor after death. This is the reason why every dead person is accorded a proper funeral rite in Urhobo culture. The Urhobos believe that, when this is not done, the spirit of such a dead person wanders round the community, and posts danger to those still alive. In essence, proper burial rites are assurance of protection for the living than securing a safe passage for the dying; and it is also believed that, the dead are more powerful than the living. Many people are of the opinion that, death is loss of a soul. Although, there is recognition of the difference between the physical person that is buried, and the non-physical person who lives on, this should not be compromised with a Western dualism that separates "physical" from "spiritual". At death, no part of that person lives on, rather, the whole person is considered dead and now lives in the spirit world, receiving a new body identical to the earthly body, but with more powers to move about as an ancestor (www.wikipedia.com retrieved June 28, 2013). There are also, many

different opinions about the place the departed go to, a place which in most cases, seem to be a replica of this world. For some, it is under the earth, in groves, near or in the homes of earthly families, or on the other side of a deep river. In most cases, it is an extension of what is known at present, while for others, it is a much better place without pain or hunger.

The view of the Urhobo traditional thinker regarding the concept of death may appear at first, unsatisfactory. This work therefore, evaluates the concept of death from the Urhobo cultural perspective. To appreciate this view therefore, there is need to first understand the people, their psychosomatic dimension, beliefs and their whole life system. It is for this reason this work also discussed the background of the Urhobo nation in order to make their idea of death more comprehensible to those outside their socio-cultural worldview.

Aim of the Study

This study sets out to re-establish the existence of Urhobo tradition, which serves as our basis for the analysis of the concept of death in Urhobo traditional thought. The concept “death” like most other concepts, is an ambiguous word that has been subjected to varied interpretations, meanings and usages. It is therefore, the aim of this study to explore and evaluate the general concept of death, in order to find out, if this concept is a fact or myth among the pre-literate Urhobo of Delta State, Nigeria. This evaluation is carried out by a true presentation of the beliefs and practices of the Urhobo.

Scope of the Study

As pointed out in the topic, this study is carried out among the pre-literate Urhobo ethnic group which is found in Delta State (South-South), Nigeria. Our subject matter is to examine the traditional concept and belief about death among the Urhobo. The study covered the time before and after the advent of the British and colonial era in Africa in general and Urhobo in particular. The

concept (death) is limited to the existence and rationality of Urhobo culture.

Methodology

The study adopted the analytic cum historical research design. Data were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary source include oral interviews with traditional rulers, community leaders, elders as well as retired teachers and their views, feelings, reactions and suggestions were recorded for onward transcription and empirical analysis. The secondary source includes published books, journals and internet materials among others.

Historical Background of the Urhobo People

No treatment of any aspect of the life of a people could be said to be complete without a corresponding or at least, a basic knowledge of the people in discussion. Thus, it is appropriate here to briefly explore the history of the Urhobo people. Urhobo is a major Nigerian ethnic nationality in tropical Niger Delta. According to Otite (1982:9), the Urhobo speaking people live in a territory bounded by latitudes 6⁰ and 5⁰ 15' North and longitudes 5⁰ 40' and 6⁰ 25' East. They are located in the present Delta State of Nigeria. They occupy the southern portion of the Benin lowland and the floodplains and swamps of the petroleum-rich Niger delta. Their neighbours are the Isoko to the Southeast, the Itsekiri to the West, the Bini to the North, the Ijaw to the South and the Ukwani to the Northeast. With a population of about two million people (National Population Commission, 2006), the Urhobo people are the 5th largest ethnic group in Nigeria and constitutes the largest single ethnic group in Delta State. The population density in Urhoboland is about 660 persons per square kilometre. They occupy an area of 1,417 square miles (about 2% of the whole country). The Urhobo territory consists mainly of ever green forests with many oil-palm trees which provide the source of palm produce from which the Urhobo have some technological preserve. The territory is also covered by a network of streams and rivers, whose volumes of water

flow are directly connected with two climatic seasons: the dry season (November to March) and the wet/dry season (April to October) with a short dry period in August referred to as “August Break”. These physical and natural resources play an important function in the social and economic lives of the people. The main economic mainstay of the people is sustained mainly, by agricultural subsistence- farming and fishing. In addition, there are few commercial business and education centres like Warri, Ughelli, Sapele, Oorerokpe, Abraka, Agbarho to mention but a few.

There are presently, four major traditions which stretched the origin of the Urhobo people beyond Bini and Ife as far as the Sudan and Egypt. However, according to one of these traditions, Urhobo was a prince, son of Oba Eweka (Egbeka) of the Bini kingdom. Having been duly blessed by his father in addition to having the royal title of Ogie (*Ovie*) of his people bestowed on him, Urhobo left Bini city with a large number of subjects during the reign of his father in about 1370, and moved southwards to found his own kingdom (Salubi, 1958:184 cited in Agbegbedia, 2003: xvii). Since then, his descendants had successfully expanded and lived in this area with their own distinct cultural practices and traditions. Furthermore, the Urhobos are a heterogeneous people, whose socio-political organisation is based on cultural unit (Agbegbedia, 2003:xviii). Presently, there are twenty two of such autonomous units referred to as sub “tribes” or “clans” and each are governed by an *Ovie* or a traditional clan head of a kind. The clans include; Agbarha-Ame, Agbarha-Otor, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Avwraka (Abraka), Ephron, Ewreni, Eghwu, Idjerhe, Oghara, Ogor, Okere-Urhobo, Okparabe, Okpe, Olomu, Orogun, Udu, Ughelli, Ughievwen, Uvwie and Ughwerun (Emekpe, 1980:9-10). Besides, the Urhobo territory is grouped into ten administrative local government councils out of the twenty five councils in Delta State.

For traditional Urhobo, community is much more than simply a social grouping of people bound together by reasons of natural origin and/or deep common interests and values. It is both a society as well as a unity of the visible and invisible worlds; the

world of the physically living on the one hand, and the world of the ancestors, divinities and souls of children yet to be born to individual kin-groups on the other. In a wider sense, Urhobo traditional community comprehends the totality of the world of its experience, including the physical environment, as well as all spirit beings, acknowledged by a given group.

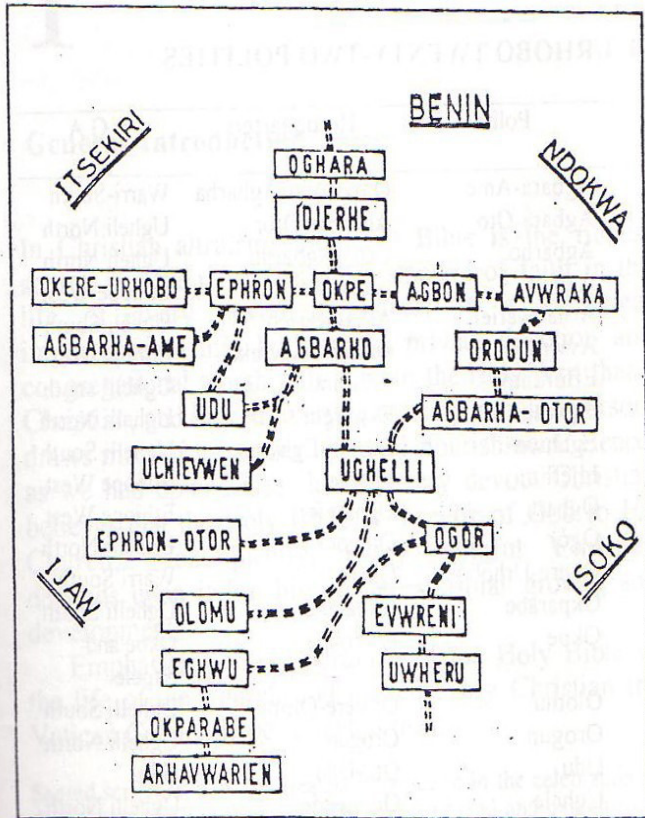


Figure 1: Map of Urhobo-land showing the twenty two clans
Literature Review

Most literature on Urhobo culture, especially those written by Urhobos, has at its point of attention, a true presentation of the real picture of the traditional culture, as it is believed and practised by the Urhobo themselves. The primary reason has been to rise to the challenges of correcting the false images of the black-man and his culture, greatly misunderstood and misinterpreted abroad by the 'stay at home' European investigators and writers. As a matter of fact, some Urhobo writers in reaction to European scholars who described the Urhobo cultures and religions in disparaging terms, dress up Urhobo deities with Hellenic robes and parade them before the Western world to show that Urhobos were as civilised as Europeans. However, due to the emphasis to correct the erroneous ideology about the black-man and his cultural views, most of the literature put forward has not been from the strict critical perspective.

It is understandable, however, that before there can be an objective and critical look on any given phenomenon, there has to be, first and foremost, a comprehensive presentation of that phenomenon. This is what most other writers have done in several ways. Apart from being a critique of all the former erroneous notions outsiders held about the culture and tradition of the Urhobo, and a faithful report of the culture as it is practised by both living men and women as passed on by the forebears, the definition of culture could be understood from the Urhobo experience and gives the characteristics of the Urhobo culture and tradition, in which the concept of death is treated to point out the belief of this reality among them. The African concept of eschatology portrays the belief in the existential reality of death which is one of the concepts that belong to the body of Urhobo cultural consciousness. Besides, the Urhobo conceptual view of man in his state of predestination and final destiny, which is a pointer to death and life after death, has also been treated by Nabofa (1982) in his 'Survey of Urhobo Traditional Religion' in the book titled '*The Urhobo People*'.

In exploring the basic features that constitute the essence of the Urhobo culture, (Riamela, 1994) anthropologically examined man as being in the centre of the Urhobo cultural thought-forms, radiating in all that he is engaged in, from birth to death and beyond. Erivwo (1986:21-43) while treating *Traditional Religion and Christianity among the Urhobo*, succinctly discussed the concept of God in Urhobo belief as a Supreme Being, his derivable attributes, the cult of the ancestors, the divinities, man, death and the afterlife. Erhuen (1987) in his inquiry into the full discovery of the dignity of the human person, irrespective of race, sex, place and time, pointed out the reality of death and life after death as a very strong belief among the Urhobo people in his *Dialogue with non-Christian Religious in Africa*.

After all these scholarly works in which the concept of death and life after death among the Urhobo has extensively and diversely been discussed, one wonders if there is still something new that should still be discussed from Urbobo perspectives. With this recognition however, this study made an inquiry and not a definite and final word, on the concept of death among the Urhobos.

Notions of Death and Immortality

The concepts of death and immortality are two distinct concepts that have been used frequently, with clear and precise meanings, not only among the Urhobo, but universally. However, there are some definitions and divisions which should be considered when discussing these concepts. Like most other concepts, these terms have been defined and explained by different scholars and authors in different ways. Nevertheless, death in its widest sense entails the cessation of the vital process in a living organism (Mondin, 1985:264). Mondin went forth to define death in the language of molecular biology, as the dissolution of the molecular structuralisation necessary for the phenomenon of life. Philosophically, death is the separation of the soul from the body. Besides, death is the permanent cessation of all biological functions

that sustain a living organism (www.wikipedia.com retrieved June 28, 2013).

From the above, two basic types of death can be deduced: clinical and absolute. Clinical death is the one that provokes in man, the cessation of the functions needed by the body, but not necessarily the separation of the soul from the body. However, absolute death is the definitive separation of the soul from the body. On the other hand, according to Mondin (1985:264) immortality is perenniality of life and etymologically, it means lack of death. Saint Thomas gave a very comprehensive definition to the term immortality which is *immortalitas dicitur potentiam quondam ad semper vivendum et non moriendum*, meaning: immortality signifies a certain power to always live and to not die (Thomas, quoted in Mondin, 1985:264). In other words, immortality is the continued and perennial existence of the spiritual dimension of man, the soul. Thus, immortality cannot be said to have anything in common with either apparent death or with survival of someone in the memory of a family, friends or descendants. Rather, immortality is synonymous with the ontological survival in the identity of the proper unique and unrepeatable being, which occurs after the death of the body. In essence, Mondin is of the view that immortality should not be equated with God or the Angels, since they are beings who by their own nature, are completely removed from the contagion of death while immortality is a feature which only man can adorn himself with. Therefore, man in his more macroscopic, obvious, and tangible dimension, succumbs unchallengeably to death. It is due to this fact that death is said to wreak havoc and as well raise the question of immortality legitimately.

Drama of Death

Death is a dramatic event which everyone must confront on his own account. There are no chief judges, no attorneys, no delegates nor representatives. Not to be moribund, but the king, emperor, prime minister, president, the professor and the lawyer can all be substituted for. This possibility of substitution however, is

completely doomed to failure, when there is brought into play, that possibility of being which is constituted by the reaching of the end on the part of the person, and that, as such, to confer upon him, his totality (Mondin, 1985:265). It is impossible for someone to die for another person. In essence, every man must always assume his own death himself. More so, the tragic event of death is particularly dramatic because of its characteristics, which include among others, universality, inevitability, imminence and fear.

The unpredictability and inevitability of death fascinate and frighten the broad range of humanity. This fear and frustration is quite evident in natural disasters and in acts of war and terror. Hence, there continues a deep rooted denial of the gruesomeness and end of death. The natural yearning to live on has generated such beliefs as the Greek immortality of the soul as well as the different Eastern notions of reincarnation, which frequently appear in Urhobo cultures. Nevertheless, despite the inevitability of death, the Urhobo accept death in daily life. This opinion can be seen in a set of beliefs sometimes referred to as “ancestor worship” or “reincarnation”. The Urhobo believe the spirit of the deceased remains in the world and that, the dead person can come back embodied in another person. This is an affirmation of Mbiti (1970:46) view that:

For the Africans, death is a separation and not annihilation: the dead person is suddenly cut off from the human society and yet, the corporate group clings to him. This is shown through the elaborate funeral rites as well as other methods of keeping in contact with the departed.

For Heidegger (1987) man is a being unto death. For him therefore, this death is enigmatic, a mystery which its reality is beyond human comprehension. Nevertheless, from the Urhobo perspectives, it is the total negation of the sound health of human life, the height of all evils. Among the Urhobo, the concept ‘death’ is referred to as *ughwuomiavwe* meaning death is a pain. Thus, due to this Urhobo frame of mind in particular and African in general, decades are spent

grieving over a lost dear one. Peoples' emotions are often suspended for a long time after the death of such a beloved one.

Urhobo Idea of the Concept 'Death'

Without mincing words, every living human being, no matter the form and essence, innately suffers from phobia, since no one normally and naturally wants to be non-existent and a nonentity. Thus, the first natural instinctive reaction when death confronts one is fright (Riamela, 1994:22). This could be said of the Urhobo, who also exhibit this characteristic, which is common to all mankind. However, value of death is only appreciated after a deep reflection. This prompts the Urhobo to say that "*ahehakup'erivwin-in, ijo, agha*" meaning, it is forbidden even when playing about, to wander into the spirit world. This is based on the fact that no one goes there and returns. Since death entails sinking down to the base of spiritual realm, the act of death, therefore, is the channel, a sort of gateway through which this is achieved. This gateway through which one must pass is referred to as "*urhoro*"-entrance (oral interview with Owhatuemuhor) while the gate person (security man) who must open before one passes through is known as "*orhi'urhoro*".

Apart from the fright and later appreciation of death as mentioned above, the reactional attitude of the Urhobo when death occurs varies with sex, age, status in the community and types of death; and each of these determines the burial rituals to be performed. This begins from un-mournful posture for an infant and the wicked, to an absolute shock and grief for the young, who dies prematurely and finally to that of a happy expectation of a very old and successful person, whose death is celebratedly described as home going (oral interview with Aregbovwe) a preposition of an abode beyond. According to Aregbovwe also, anyone who dies at a young age is always buried early in the day, an implication of the fact that he or she did not live to the evening of his or her life. Whereas, those who live to the evening (the aged) of their lives are buried at dusk. On the other hand, those who are really considered to be wicked, for instance, witches, armed robbers, criminals, murderers, their corpses are quickly disposed off without any form

of ceremony (oral interview with Onobrakpeya). The Urhobo has also proverbially related death to sleep by saying “*ovwerekoh’ughwu*” (oral interview with Adjekpuhele) for at sleep, the consciousness of who, what and where one is, is lost until one wakes up again. This made the Urhobo assert that sickness is a messenger of death “*emiavweoyenukonr’ughwu* (oral interview with Agbede). This assertion concurs with the Yoruba saying as noted by Mbiti (1970:255) that, it is sickness and not death that can be cured.

Furthermore, the Urhobo view death as a natural phenomenon mostly when it involves a young person who is considered not to have lived the fullness of his or her life as earlier stated. In such a situation, everything possible is done, especially through divination and consultation to find out whom and what is responsible for the death. For instance, if the deceased happened to be a young married man, the wife or any of the kindred is accused and such a victim will be allowed to undergo an ordeal by drinking the water used in bathing the corpse. In other cases, a small kola nut is put in the deceased’s mouth after which, it will be given to the accused person with some of the saliva (Parinder, 1949 cited in Riamela, 1994:23). However, if the accused person is unharmed by these measures, such a person is then declared innocent and thus acquitted.

It is proper to state at this juncture that, different attitudes of the Urhobo are occasioned by the different types of death. This is in accordance with Riamela (1994:23) conclusion that, the type of burial a person is accorded in Urhobo land, derived from the way such a person died and in accordance to how he or she lived while on earth. For example, one who is drowned in water must be buried beside the river-bank. For the Urhobo, that is where such a person properly belonged, hence, he or she died in water. One who dies in the bush must not be buried in the town but in the bush. A woman who dies with pregnancy must be taken to the bush for burial. One who commits suicide must be buried outside the town. One who dies of deadly diseases such as small box, leprosy or swollen body must also be buried outside the town. Anyone who commits murder must

also be killed in return and buried outside the town. Each of these highlighted cases is regarded by the Urhobo, like most other Africans, according to Metuh (1985:119) as an ill-luck. Thus, they must not be buried in any available or nearby bush, but in what is known to the Urhobo as “*eghwar’ode*” or “*udjuhe*”—the big bush, evil forest (oral interview with Owhatuemuhor) or bad bush as is known elsewhere. Besides, such a village or town must be ritually cleansed or purified in order to ward off the spirits of such ill-fated people who would be wandering about disturbing and hunting the inhabitants and also to prevent further occurrence of such misfortunes among the people.

However, anyone who dies in his or her house, whether old or young, is regarded by the Urhobo to have died peacefully. Thus, it is always the prayer and wishes of the Urhoboman to die old and also in one’s personal house. This prompts the saying in Urhobo that “*uwevwinr’ohwo, oyeneghweho*” meaning, it is in one’s own house that one is expected to die. More so, the Urhobo like any other ethnic group, know the inevitability of death and thus, express this idea as “*die di’urheohwodjegbanewovwomr’arhorib’evweder’ohwor’akpovwo je ghwo*”? (what tree is the earthly person going to embrace for refuge that will make him or her to escape death?) Also, “*t’efet’ebo, edj’ohwoughwu-u*”, that is, riches nor amulets does not prevent one from dying. Again, “*wo cha mre none, ovreughwu-u*”; meaning, that you vow to destroy somebody today is not more than death. These are some of the various ways in which the Urhobo concept of death is exhibited.

With the full recognition that the human person has not the authority over his life but God (Oghene) himself alone, the Urhobo complete idea about death in the conclusive analysis like every other culture, is that of resignation to the Divine will. According to an Urhobo musical album by Sonny Young (quoted by Riamela, 1994:24), life to the Urhoboman is likened to a market place and one needs to go home when he finishes with the business in hand; if life to the Urhoboman is like an errand in which the human person is on

a journey; if life to the Urhoboman is the task of realising the content of one's destiny, then it becomes reasonable to go back home to give a report of one's' mission to the creator by the time one finishes the assignment of life. This idea is that of the expectation of death only when the fullness of life has been realised. Riamela (1994:24) stated that, death is a welcome thing when one has been successful in life and has become old. Anything short of this makes death painful and grievous for the irreplaceable lose of the person. This idea however, on the part of the human person, wishes its own will be done rather than that of God (Oghene) over the control of life.

The Effect of Urhobo World-Opinion on Human Thoughts

The Urhobo regards life as a combination of opposites reflected in the strong belief of a kind of life after death which is the *raison d'etre* for ancestors' believed to be living, adored while they are believed to be capable of being re-incarnated at the same time. This Urhobo conception of death concurs with Tormey's view that:

Death has been described as an oxymoron (a combination of opposites). On the other hand, death is the ultimate final. In death, the body of the deceased person deteriorates and we experience it as lifeless. On the other hand, life goes on. The person's spirit not only survives but enjoys a whole new freedom of expressions (Tormey, 1981:51).

This implies that Urhobo in his world view accommodates both uni-linear and cyclic views of time, which nevertheless, needs qualification. The Urhobo man believes that in creating man, God destined him or her to live the fullness of his or her life and time; *emiyor'obor'aghwarhe, tavwenekighwe* (oral interview with Oyovwiakedia). This entails that accomplishing a given task becomes the determining criteria for the enviable perpetual rest after death as ancestors. Thus, failure to achieve this results in the re-incarnation of the same person in his or her true personality (trait)

but has to migrate to a complete strange environment and place where he or she cannot be recognised. This will enable him or her complete the rest of his or her life before finally quitting the earthly theatre naturally. This belief of the Urhobo also concurs with Ejizu (1986:102) remarks of the Igbo that:

They (Igbo) belief in ancestral existence is the clearest expression of the peoples' faith in after life. The same belief is also the dynamic hope of the traditional Igbo; that after a successful career here on earth; one could be happily gathered with his fore fathers in the land of the living-dead to continue the interminable cycle of life.

Nevertheless, the cyclic world view of life, that is, birth, death and re-incarnation is not so pronounced among the Urhobo when compared with other cultural and traditional groups such as the Yoruba of the western Nigeria or Igbo of eastern Nigeria. There is nonetheless, the basic general belief of cyclic movement, hence the saying in Urhobo that; *ohwo nana mu kpah' akpokir'ogberero mu kpah' akpor'edefa*, meaning- this person pursues life or is serious about life like a poor person would pursue the next round of life to acquire what he lacks in the previous one (life). More so, when a corpse is put in the grave, prayers and incantations are made so that in the next birth on earth (re-incarnation), the person may not know the troubles that have accompanied him in this present life (Parinder, 1946 quoted in Riamela, 1994:9).

Furthermore, the Urhobo worldview embraces the belief that what we referred to as extended family (*orua*) in this mundane community of people has been pre-existent in the spiritual world (*erivwin*). For them therefore, beings are released from there to populate this earth and at death, one returns to it (oral interview with Owhatuemuhor). This prompts the Urhobo to say that; *uwewwinr'owhooyeneghwera; adar'whooyeneghwera* meaning- at death, one takes the lane that leads to one's own home or that one dies to one's home. Therefore, among the Urhobo, there is a belief in

what is called *erivwinr'uwevwin* (the spiritual abode of the household), *erivwinr'orua* (spiritual abode of the extended family), *erivwinr'uduwo* (spiritual abode of the street/quarter), *erivwinr'orere* (spiritual abode of the town/community), *erivwinr'ekuoto* (spiritual abode of the clan/tribe) and there are correspondingly considered sacred spots, groves or shrines at which any particular one should be invoked and venerated. This explains among other purposes, patri-linear family system inclusive, why the Urhobo like Biblical ancient Israelites (I Samuel 25:1) bury their dead ones in the homestead of their fathers to make sure that when he or she would re-incarnate, he or she would come back to life through the same family (oral interview with Aregbovwe). For the Urhobo, *erivwin* is the abode of the dead. Thus, the popular saying among the Urhobo, *me v'oyeerivwinovo* meaning, we both have one common ancestral spiritual abode (oral interview with Oyovwiakedia). However, this statement is only made when there is a dispute between two family relations emanating from suspicious cheating and lies in order to incriminate or oppress. It is therefore considered that, such awareness is enough to deter one from acting unjustly towards his or her kith and kin. The oneness invoked in such a material time is most emphatic not just because they will both lodge in the same family abode after death, but instead, that oneness already exists.

It is proper to mention here the belief of the Urhobo who associated the world with a market, and whoever accomplishes his or her assigned task, goes home to rest (oral interview with Aregbovwe). Those who transit, described to be 'a going home' are those who have lived a successful lives and died at a ripe (old) age to the extent that the living would seek to bathe themselves with the water with which the corpse is washed. This is based on the believe that they (the living) would also attain the same success and old age that such a deceased attained during his life time (oral interview with Ofiolor). It could be deduced from the above that the Urhobo opinion of life portrayed both the unilinear and cyclic view of time. It is unilinear based on the fact that when all the business of life is

completed (that is, having lived the fullness of one's time), one goes home to take his place among the ancestors (Erivwo, 1986:32). It is however cyclical in case of early death because, there is immediate migration of the person to an unknown place to his or her people, in order to live out the fullness of his or her time (oral interview with Owhatuemuhor). But because this present world is preferably considered to be better than the world beyond, the ancestors are believed to be re-incarnated with the same family. Nevertheless, prayers offered at funeral rites do not request increased happiness for the deceased nation with even greater prosperity and success.

However, despite the fact that there is a general belief in the life beyond, it is at the same time, not a place where one is eager to rush to with joy, mostly a young person. Only the aged whose generation of people is no more, and the bedridden, who out of frustration, yearn for this place where the ancestors live permanently (oral interview with Omotejohwo- a barren woman). Thus, this could be described as the paradise which Urhobos yearn as their final home-a 'heaven' in which they have a happy un-ending reunion with their folk who are waiting for them on the other side. Therefore, just as it could be affirmed that the unilinear opinion of time produces and affirms the reality of the concept of the ancestors since one is not seen again after death, so also the cyclic influence of the natural phenomenon has led to the concept of reincarnation in Urhobo vision of life. It has to be stressed however that, like other Africans, the Urhobo has not as strong a belief, in reincarnation as held by the Hindus and members of other religions such as Buddhism and Judaism. This is not to deny the belief in reincarnation among Urhobo people as in fact, resemblance between child and parents or grandparents, makes the idea of the rebirth of departed soul to be strongly held by the Urhobos. More so, the Urhobo regard this world as light, warm and living, to which the dead are only too glad to return from the underworld of darkness and cold.

Conclusion

In this study, we have explored the concept of death as viewed by the Urhobo, one of the ethnic groups in Nigeria, West Africa in African continent. First of all, we discussed the historical origin of the Urhobo before delving into their cultural believes on the concept of death. The work also established the fact that the Urhobo believe in the concept of death as well as life after death and hold it in high esteem. For them, many have been born into this world and have passed beyond it to the other side of life. Thus, it is necessary to view with utmost concern, the reality of that place towards all mortals are heading, if this world is but ephemeral and a passage. One is therefore, advised to live according to dictates of good and right moral life to inherit this abode after death as conceived by the Urhobo.

***Agbegbedia Oghenevwoke Anthony, Ph.D,** Peace and Conflict Studies Unit, College of Social and Management Sciences, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti omonoghens@yahoo.com,

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Oral Interview

Adjekpuhele, T. 69 years old, Ewu town, Delta State, June 30, 2013.

Agbede, G. 81 years old, Otughievwen town, Delta State, June 29, 2013.

Aregbovwe, C. A. 57years old man, Okparabe town, Delta State, July 1, 2013.

Ofiolor, M. 71 years old woman, Ughelli town, Delta State, July 2, 2013.

Omotejohwo, E. 81 years old barren woman, Ewu town, Delta State. June 30, 2013.

Onobrakpeya, V. 84 years old, Ughelli town, Delta State, July 2, 2013.

Owhatuemuhor, P. A. 80years old man, Okparabe town, Delta State, July 1, 2013.

Oyovwiakedia, O. 99years old man, Okparabe town, Delta State, July 1, 2013.