

FUNERAL CELEBRATIONS IN AFRICA

Teshi, Ghana-The white wooden mercedes-benz is listing. Eight pallbearers wobbling under the custom made coffin-with the hulking body of Sowah “Halala” Nortey filling nearly every square inch-struggle down rocky slope that descends into this city public cemetery.

The pallbearers steady the Mercedes coffin, to the relief of the sea of mourners behind them. The mourners return to quiet conversation as the procession snakes past the victory spot bar and the Congo Cafe, and the Step by Step Restaurant.

Bystanders crowd the road side. Many grow still. Others cross their arms or put surprised fingers to their mouths. And others smile.

Teshi, just outside Ghana’s capital Accra, has seen such spectacles almost on every weekend bases. Indeed, throughout sub-Saharan Africa, funerals are profoundly important rituals - Creative, colorful affairs that affirm the continent’s most powerful traditions and beliefs.

At funerals, children of the deceased are bestowed new parents and mourners hold long, passionate conversations with the dead. The poorest and most divided of families usually scratch together enough funds to provide a decent ceremony even if it buries them in debt. Individuals at longer heads unite during funerals, indeed some get their prospectus spouses’ from funerals.

It is not unusual for a Ghanaian to attend more than one funeral over a weekend and for that matter Africans. Yet despite the pervasiveness of death-perhaps because of it-funerals are any thing but ordinary on the continent as a whole and Ghana in particular. Far from being morbid, funerals are as a celebration in many cultures then a sorrowful event.

THE FOLLOWING ARE ORDER OF FUNERAL RITUALS IN GHANA.

1. CELEBRATING OF LIFE

The funeral brings together co-workers, neighbors, aunts, uncles, cousins, children grandchildren and people from all walks of life. The good deeds of the deceased are remembered by his love ones and relatives. A coffin is purchased according to the occupation of the deceased as a symbol of love and honor to the deceased. As seen in the introductory snarrow of Mr. Nortey who was a driver.

2. RITUAL BATH

A group of closed relatives carriers the coffin to the mortuary to retrieve the body. A popular person in the society attracts large crowd at the mortuary, but for unpopular person only the driver goes to pick the body. This takes place a day before the burial.

At home the body is kept in a well decorated room, while a group of older women prepare the body for burial. These women make the body suitable for the spirits, by cleaning and bathing it. A porch of enamel bowl containing cotton, numerous bars of soap, sponges, razor, talcum powder, camphor balls, plastic drinking cups, cloths fabrics are given to the women, these items are used to decorate the body and are added into the coffin for the body to go with, the belief is that the individual will live in the spirit world and hence should not lack any thing. After the ritual bath donations are collected from friends and love ones.

3. TO THE CEMETRY

Family members will place all items that are supposed to go with the body including expensive jewelry to the grave into the coffin. Then the pallbearers carriers the body to the burial centre. Some are buried in the public cemetery; much older people living in their own houses as well as chiefs are buried at the centre of the house or the family cemetery.

On the way to the cemetery distilled palm wine is splatter on the ground to pave way for the spirit of the deceased. At the grave the coffin is placed in a sandy hole; a prayer is said in the form of incantations before the grave is covered.

“May your ancestors receive you”

“May your mother and father receive you in peace”

“Send our greetings to our ancestors, go well”

4. FAMILY MEETING

Here the family meets to discuss on matters that arise during the funeral, expenses if there is any debt incurred, and how to reunite the family and fill his/her vacuum. If the deceased had wife and children a care taker is assigned to them. The wife is recommended to marry the brother of the deceased so he can take care of her and the children as well.

A prayer is said for the family and the last of all libations is poured and the chief mourner declares the funeral over.