

# Funeral Antagonism among the Akan: a focus on the death of a male

Emmanuel Antwi Fordjour<sup>\*1</sup>, Osei Yaw Akoto<sup>†2</sup> and Maxwell Mpotsiah<sup>‡3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana*

<sup>2</sup>*Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana*

<sup>3</sup>*University of Education, Winneba*

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## Abstract

Funeral ceremonies, from the Akan ethnographic perceptive, have the sole objective to honour the dead for their meritorious services to mankind. During such ceremonies, family members who have not been seen for years come together. It is a period used to settle family disputes, and in a situation where a man dies, family members get the opportunity to re-socialize with his wife and children who might have been well-educated and hold key positions in life and they are happy to have gotten such a well-nurtured and beautiful children to be part of their family. In the olden days, married women used to move into their husband's family house to be integrated with the family such that they were allowed to continue living there even after their husband's demise. However, due to urbanization and modernization, this cherished relationship seems to be waning. Some funeral ceremonies have degenerated into conflicts and therefore, disunited some families. The paper discusses the causes of funeral antagonism among the Akans in Ghana with an emphasis on the death of a man and also prescribes solutions to address it.

**Keywords:** Antagonism; Akan Funerals; Death rituals; Superstition; Man.

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## 1 Introduction

Wylie and Shircore (1998) hold the view that death is the physical cessation of life and a dead person is a person who is no more living. If a person dies, both his physical body and his soul dies. A person who dies ceases to have any correlation with the living (Gedzi et al. 2020). The Akan ethnographic concept on the contrary, postulates that a dead person joins his/her ancestors to continue the life they led terrestrially. Therefore, a person who is denied a befitting burial or whose death is incongruous with the Akan statutory death becomes a wandering ghost who perambulates aimlessly to terrify the living, especially children. That is why it behoves on the living to organize a befitting burial and funeral for the person to avoid an impending calamity (Kearl, 1989). According to Akans, a person is not considered dead until he is buried.

Akans only celebrate good death (Crentsil, 2007) and their definition of good death is a death resulting from old age. This can be as a result of abrupt sickness which leads to physical deterioration and ultimately to death. Geest (2002) and Rattray (1927) describe a good death as the one in which the dying is surrounded by his relatives and children who offer him water to drink to signify his peaceful death. It is a sort of death devoid of any foul controversy, and it is natural but not accidental like suicide or any violent death. According to Nkansa Kyeremateng (2010):

“Natural death relates to death which occurs at a ripe age. Before the person draws his final breath, he is required to be given a sip of water which, it is believed, will sustain him on his journey into the spirit world. Community owes any person who so dies funeral celebration, as a duty” (Nkansa Kyeremateng, 2010: 78).

If a person dies peacefully, it means he has been at peace with all manner of people while on earth. A person who dies honourably becomes an ancestor (see Donkor, 1997). An ancestor is not considered a god but an entity who intervenes for the living (Sarpong, 2011). They are also believed



Corresponding author:  
Emmanuel Antwi Fordjour

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\*Email: eafordjour@gmail.com

†Email: oseiyaw.akoto@yahoo.com

‡Email: mpotsiahmax@gmail.com

to manifest themselves in so many ways to intercede for the living (Salm et al., 2002). Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020) opine that a person whose death does not comply with the Akan concept of good death is not granted a befitting burial. This confirms why infantile, suicidal, and pandemic victims are buried in haste without any adherence to funeral protocols. This is done in order not to evoke the wrath of their gods who can cause more deaths in that particular family.

Akans believe that the dead and the living have intimacy. In that respect, they do not only consider death as a wicked entity but they also classify it as sadist and unsympathetic, especially when it is unexpected or the person involved is young. Due to their belief that death does not truncate human life but that life continues following a good death, Akans sacrificed some wives and servants of a dead king to serve him in the afterlife. The king's sub-chiefs also swear an oath of allegiance to him when he dies and he is laid in state. They also believe that death is the beginning of a journey into another world where the dead person joins the ancestors, and automatically occupies a position to receive family members (Arhin, 1994).

Colourful funerals are organized to honour the dead for their meritorious services on earth, and to also usher them into another world, Asamando (Agyeman, 2003; Alhassan, 2009). Pokuuaa, (2009) also argues that, the Asantes conceive death and funeral as inseparable and indispensable and their belief that when a person dies, he makes a transition into the next world and lives as an ancestor motivates them to organize a befitting burial and funeral for the dead. According to Kastenbaum, (1977), a funeral is a ceremony in which the mortal remains of the person is present, as opposed to a memorial service where the contrary happens. He further asserts that whenever a person is mourned, there is an expression of emotions. This is clearly demonstrated in the mourning of a person in an Akan community, where dirges are sung to extol the virtues of the dead, and to send a message to those who are already dead to mediate on their behalf (Nketia, 1955). Some mourners also mourn their dead in a dramatic way to demonstrate how the person's death has created a vacuum in their lives. If the dead was a breadwinner, he/she is asked to continue to provide for their needs whilst with the dead.

Funeral ceremony and its organization have become an albatross on the neck of this present generation because they require huge investment of time and money (Horowitz, (1991). de Witte (2001) opines that, in Ghana, whenever a person dies, it triggers the flow of money, and that precipitates funeral business. He is of the view that funeral has been commercialized to such an extent that the mentality and approach to organize it are geared towards amassing copious wealth and that, death, more than any other life event, seems to inspire people to artistic creation. de Witte discusses how some people throng the funeral site with the view of deriving entertainment, in the form of traditional and modern music, and sumptuous food and drinks. This assertion has been buttressed by Aboram-pah, (1999) who is of the view that funeral ceremonies are gradually becoming a commercial event in which huge sum of money is invested into them.

Funeral celebrations are cumbersome and time consuming, and entail multiple ceremonies commemorating the day the person dies, the One week, Forty Day, and finally, the Annual celebrations. Nowadays, the mortal remains of a person can be preserved for months. For example, during the outbreak of the Corona-Virus (COVID-19) pandemic, some dead bodies which were not infected by the virus were preserved in the morgue for almost a year or more before their burial. This is because some families did not take kindly to burying their loved ones in a private way without the usual opulent style. Whenever there is a stalemate in this regard, it degenerates into uncontrollable conflict resulting into division and antagonism (Gamino, Easterling, Stirman and Sewell, 2010).

According to Crabtree (2010), modern funerals are totally different from what existed in the past. In the olden days, it was a ceremony to mourn and honour the dead for their unflinching support to humanity. The opulent display of funerals in recent times demonstrate that there is total deviation from the retrospective motive. She asserts:

"Today's funeral is not the funeral of a year ago, ten years ago, and certainly not fifty or hundred years ago. The contemporary funeral is often chosen from a 'cafeteria-style presentation of what might loosely be termed 'rituals' along with the necessary accoutrement and elected techniques for personalization, all aimed at celebrating the uniqueness of the

deceased" (Crabtree, 2010:2).

In the past, whenever a person died, his family mourned him or her in the traditional way. They wore sackcloth for a year as a form of honour. A dead body was not preserved for more than three days because there was no morgue. The body was buried, and the funeral fixed for some few weeks or months. Also, whenever a person died, the family fasted for forty days. They abstained from eating heavy food. The staple food for the Asantes is "fufu", which is a combination of cooked cassava and plantain or cooked cassava and cocoyam, pounded and eaten with soup. They again abstained from eating food prepared with plantain, cassava, yam, cocoyam and any common delicacy of the Asantes. If a person flouted this cultural norm, he/she was considered rejoicing in the death of the dead person, and could be castigated for having a stake in the death. It is a perception nowadays that, a funeral does not attract a big crowd when the body is not laid in state. It means that if a body is buried and the funeral is adjourned for some days, the concentration and the zeal of sympathizers wane because of the absence of the dead body. In a situation where the place to bury the dead is far, a family may decide to do the burial on Thursday, rest on Friday, and organize the funeral on Saturday and Sunday.

Akans distinguish between burial and funeral. The burial encompasses the laying in state, whilst the funeral is a ceremony that entails social gathering accompanied by the beating of drums, eating and drinking, and monetary donations to assist the bereaved family to defray the expenses of the funeral. This is the time the public demonstrate their love for the dead person and his/her family. Some people term funeral donations as "keep it for me". What this means is that if one donates during your bereavement, you also have to reciprocate when he is also bereaved lest he becomes offended. "When A's father died, I attended it and made a donation but when mine occurred, he did not reciprocate" and that can result in a feud. Appiah (2007) and Arhin (1994) affirm that there are varieties in funeral organizations. Contemporary Akan funerals for parents are ostentatiously and extravagantly organized. Huge sums of money are invested into them without considering the risks that might occur, such as low attendance or bad weather. People who have high social standing such as politicians, intellectuals with higher degrees, the clergy, business people etc. are adorned with grand funerals, while the less fortunate have smaller funerals.

In spite of the negative tendencies associated with contemporary funerals, it remains a social event which brings family members from every nook and cranny together to participate in the funeral ceremony. It is also an occasion to meet some family members who have not been seen for years. Arhin (1994) argues that modern funeral rites are a substitute for the parties of business men. He describes a funeral as a primary social event that is about creating, maintaining, and strengthening relationships, and an occasion to settle disputes in the family

## 2 Method of the Study

The researchers used the qualitative method to gather the data for one month. They relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were collected through interviews, which were conducted with fifteen respondents who were chosen at random in some villages and towns in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. We decided to select some villages in the Afigya Sekyere West District of Ashanti Region where funeral is celebrated in an indigenous manner and superstition is prevalent. Due to the sensitive nature of this research topic, we decided not to disclose our respondents and the locations of the incidents to avoid confrontation and perhaps legal wrangling. Primary data was also collected through participant observation at some funerals. A focus group of five was used to illicit additional information. The objective was to find out the causes of funeral antagonism with an emphasis on the death of a man. Akans practise matrilineal system of inheritance and for that matter, if a woman dies, it does not foment antagonism as compared to the death of a man who belongs to a different family. We have also included some five case studies as part of our primary source of data to buttress our assertions. We read some books, dissertations, articles and other materials to complement the primary data we collected. Our limitation in the data collection was the reluctance of some of our respondents to give us accurate information and others refusal to open up to us.

### 3 Akan Funeral, an Overview

Organizing a funeral in any Akan community is a herculean task. It is laborious and cumbersome because it undergoes so many stages. The moment a person dies, he is placed in a morgue for preservation to enable the family prepare adequately for the funeral. It can happen that the wife witnessed the death of her husband but she has to be informed of his death. Some family members are delegated to embark on that, and they present a bottle of schnapps to officially announce his death. The same thing is done when a wife also dies. The chief in the village is also informed of his death by presenting schnapps. Anybody who matters to the dead person is informed. Family members, all over the country and abroad whose contacts are known, are also informed.

The day after his death, there is pre-funeral discussion on when and how to celebrate the one week, and subsequently the grand funeral. Normally one week ceremony is done a week after his death but nowadays, it can be adjourned to two weeks or more but the time lapse must not be too long. At dawn of the One Week, women family members wake up to cry to express their grief over the death of their beloved and also to inform neighbours that that day is the One Week and for that matter they should assist them to celebrate. In the morning, family members gather to receive greetings from their village or town folks. Some religious groups who attend morning services come as a group to express their condolences to the bereaved family.

Around eight o'clock in the morning, the family sits in the family house to discuss matters pertaining to the funeral. The funeral committee of that village visits them to discuss the funeral dates with them because sometimes, there are funeral backlogs and the committee has to regulate them. The new date is communicated to the gathering. Around 1:30 pm, the family sits in public to receive condolences from well-wishers. Canopies are erected as a shade with some chairs provided for the invited guests. Some traditional music and mourning songs are played to make the place entertaining. Some families go to the extent of providing food, water, and assorted drinks to the gathering whilst the latter also reciprocate in donating money termed as *Nsawa* to the bereaved family. The names of the donors and the amount donated are announced to express gratitude. Some donors may be offended if the announcer haphazardly announces it or if the family does not express any gratitude. The One Week celebration, sometimes, helps the family to get seed money to pre-finance the main funeral.

#### 3.1 *The Main Funeral*

The main funeral involves the renovation of a family house which might not have been renovated for years. It is necessary because visitors of the dead person's church members, his work colleagues, classmates and other high dignitaries as well as his nuclear and extended family members' sympathizers might be present at the funeral, and it will be a disgrace to see one's family house in a total dilapidation. Therefore, the building is well-painted and some renovations are made to make it attractive. Some wealthy people even build a house to accommodate their visitors and to lay the body in state.

Expenses to be incurred during the funeral are: Mortuary fee, an ambulance hired to convey the dead body to the place of the funeral and burial, coffin for the burial, and the undertaker's fees. Other expenses include hiring of canopies, chairs, mattresses for the invited guests, hiring of hotels and guest houses for their visitors. In this era of Corona-Virus pandemic, the family buys tissues, veronica buckets to store water and hand sanitizers to clean hands. Food and drinks are served to satisfy all visitors who have come to mourn with them.

Meanwhile, the family had printed invitation cards to invite friends and posters and banners are displayed on buildings and sometimes, on billboards in the city or town. Some families announce their funerals on the television and radio stations as a form of advertisement. Others also announce them at information centres. The grave is well-decorated by laying some blocks inside, plastering it and tiling inside with nice tiles. The body has to be adorned with expensive clothing to make it attractive. Some royals, such as chiefs, kings, and queens are adorned with gold and ornaments. To distinguish themselves from invited guests, some family members buy two common cloths which will be worn on Saturday and Sunday.

### 3.2 ***Widowhood Rites***

When a man dies, it is the duty of his wife to perform the widowhood rites. It is believed that if the wife refuses to do that the ghost of the man will torment her, and that might affect her well-being spiritually, physically and psychologically. The woman is restricted from doing certain things like eating certain types of food such as yam and cassava, which are uprooted from the soil where the husband will be put to rest. It will imply disrespect for her late husband, and may have some spiritual implications if the woman ate those foodstuffs. The widow is supposed to bath three times a day, the first bath at 4am and the last at 5pm. Every night, she is supposed to put the sandals of her late husband at the doorsteps of her room to ward off any evil spirit that might enter there to torment her. It is emphasized that as part of the rituals, women in Ashanti go into seclusion in the dark, and are asked to bath with cold water. After the burial and the funeral of the man, she is obliged to wear black sackcloth for a year.

Nowadays, a dead body is taken from the mortuary on Friday evening and deposited at a place where it will be laid in state pending the decoration of where it will be laid in state. A woman who is performing widowhood rites comes with assorted items such as bathing costumes, sprays, beddings etc. to lay bed for her dead husband. This is termed as “Adwareej yie”. They are things she will use to bath her husband for the last time. Among the Akans, when a dead body is taken from the mortuary, it is bathed before it is laid in state. The widow therefore provides things that will be used to bath it and to lay its bed as she used to do when he was alive.

Before the mortal remains are deposited in a coffin, the widow or the widower is asked to bring her “Adesiedej”- Burial items. This comprises the cloth that the dead person will wear, some traditional drinks, transportation fare (Hyjntiadej), which is tightened in a knotted handkerchief. The significance is that, the dead person is travelling to the next world, and will need money to pay for his transport. This money is normally not huge and other loved ones like children, friends, church members etc. also provide that. He will also need the handkerchief to wipe his face because the journey he is embarking on is far, and the sun can be scorching. All these, including wreaths are bestowed on the dead person before it is deposited in a coffin.

After the burial, preparations are made for the funeral. During the funeral, there is exhibition of items known as “Nnocma kyerj”. This comprises assorted drinks, both soft and alcoholic, handkerchiefs to be given to sympathizers, matches, and other souvenirs. This is done to adorn the dead person. It must be emphasized that premium is placed on the death of a man than a woman when it comes to “Adwareejyie –Bathing costumes, Hyjntiadej –Valedictory items and Nnocma kyerj – Exhibition of things. Akans believe that, when a man dies and no widowhood rites are performed, the man goes to “Asamando” – the next world, naked and becomes “Samandagya” – A naked ghost, and whoever sees him will not welcome him and he therefore becomes “Samantwjwtwn” – Wandering Ghost, who perambulates in the streets not knowing where to go. This is why some families beg some women who are not traditionally married to a man to perform the widowhood rites of their dead family member. This is because, if a man has not performed the customary rites of a woman, she is not obliged to perform the widowhood rites.

Women perform widowhood rites to honour their husbands who had been instrumental in their lives such as giving birth to children, educating them and providing shelter for them. Some women give birth to about ten children, and they are grateful to their husband for that because children are cherished in Akan communities. Some Akans talk about children but not money. It must be noted that, Akans practise the matrilineal system of inheritance meaning that children belong to the woman but not the husband. There are some ethnic groups in Ghana like the Ewes, Dagaare, etc. who also practise patrilineal system of inheritance. If a woman is barred from undergoing the widowhood rites, she is not considered as the wife of her late husband. For that matter, some women strive to be considered as such even to the extent of resorting to legal redress in a situation where they are prevented from performing the rights in order that they will not be excluded from inheriting the man's property. However, the Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2002) recounts the molestation of women who undergo widowhood rites in developing countries in Africa. It is believed that widowhood rites are ways of making the women undergo some form of

rehabilitation but “some of the practices involved are cruel, degrading and traumatic for the victims and amount to a denial of their rights” (UNECA, 1984:7). The abstinence from economic activities may also bestow undue hardship on the widow. Some families take care of the widow by giving her what is termed “Akcnhoma” – “Daily housekeeping money” but this is not normally adequate to mitigate the hardship of the woman and some well-to-do families take care of the deceased children. Meanwhile, widowers are not subjected to such a critical observance of the rites.

#### **4 Perceptions and Realities Fomenting Funeral Antagonism**

The researchers interviewed twenty elderly Akans at Ayeduase near Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology on factors that are likely to spark funeral antagonism, and the comments made by our respondents were that some men renege in the upbringing of their children thinking that when a child is catered for academically and he/she becomes rich, it is the woman’s family that stands to benefit the most because of the matrilineal system of inheritance. Instead, some Akan men concentrated on providing for their nephews and nieces. While modern law has changed this concept, some illiterates and Indigenous Akans still hold this view. A woman retorted that her father did not sponsor her higher education and rather supported his nephew to further his education. Therefore, if he dies, she, her siblings, and her mother will leave it to his family to organize the funeral. In this case, if they do not honour their funeral obligations, the man’s family will see them as wicked and antagonize them. The man’s family may bar them from taking part in the funeral and may decide to have nothing to do with them.

Furthermore, some men practise polygamy and have children from multiple women, despite Christianity and modernity. A polygamous man who is not financially sound may find it difficult to take good care of his children and wives and he will be considered as irresponsible and will be treated with impunity. When he dies, his children and wives may be adamant to his funeral by showing lackadaisical attitude to it. The funeral of men with many children from different mothers sometimes end up in a huge debt because the children normally collect the Tribute money (Nsawa) without bringing it to the public domain. When that happens, the leader of the funeral, be it the head of the family or the brother of the deceased antagonize them and in a situation where the man left some property, it is sold or rented to make up for the debt which the children disagree and that brings about antagonism.

Some men are autocratic and exercise domineering authorities over their wives. Maybe this is as a result of the man endowed culturally and spiritually as the breadwinner of the family. Some men think that they married a woman and for that matter, they expect the woman to succumb to all his directives. In some homes, there is no democracy as what the man says is final. Some men go to the extent of abusing a woman physically and go scot-free because the woman thinks that if she institutes legal action against him and he is imprisoned, nobody will cater for her and her children. It is a fact in Ghana that the government is not responsible for the maintenance of children and wife of an imprisoned husband.

Whenever a man persistently behaves this way, his wife and children become aggrieved and at times neglect him in his old age most especially, when he falls sick and becomes bedridden as a form of vengeance. When such a man dies, his family may ascribe his death to maltreatment meted out to him by his wife and children and may decide not to allow them have any stake in the funeral and that mars their cordial relationship.

### **5 Causes of Akan Funeral Antagonisms**

#### **5.1 *Invocation of Duabo***

Akans believe in the existence of the Supreme God as the creator of all things, living and non-living. God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscience. He sees all things both good and bad and most of their folktales are based on this premise. They also believe in the power of evil spirits who can bedevil mankind with miseries and unnatural occurrences. They again believe in lesser gods, dwarfs, rivers, trees, and natural catastrophes such as thunder and lightning as powers which can punish wicked people.

Agyekum (1999) describes Duabo, as a type of religious verbal curse which involves the employ-



ment of magical and supernatural powers to cause harm to one's addressee. Duab in Ashanti Region of Ghana is considered a verbal taboo. Traditional rulers have banned it but some people persist in invoking it. The invocation of curse comes in different forms, and these usually come with verbal pronouncement. There is the call on natural elements like lightening, thunder, and other natural catastrophe to deal with offenders. The most common among the Asante is the invocation of a water deity, with an egg and sometimes wine/gin, accompanied by the statement that the deity should vindicate him/her if he/she has done wrong, and kill or cause misfortune to the one who has wronged him (Adu-Gyamfi, 2015). In the Asante Region of Ghana, one popular river which is terrific and is believed to be linked to such deaths is the Antoasuo Nyamaa (Adu-Gyamfi, 2015). It is a very small stream located at Antoa, a village north of Kumasi. It is worshipped by people within and outside Antoa, and has a fetish priest who offers sacrifices to expiate the spirit of the river to be magnanimous to its offenders. It is believed that if it is invoked, it can even travel abroad to deal with perpetrators of any heinous crimes. Other rivers and streams also possess powers, but the Antoasuo Nyamaa is one of the most powerful and trusted deity.

Instances where Antoasuo Nyamaa powers are manifested are for example when a farmer's farm produce is stolen by an unknown person. The farmer can invoke Antoasuo Nyamaa or any other stream near the farm to punish the perpetrator. The curse is invoked by taking a cup of water and pouring it down three times while invoking some words such as: 'I invoke Antoasuo Nyamaa to kill the person who stole plantain or cassava from my farm'. Or if an allegation is leveled against another and he sees it as baseless and unfounded, he can invoke that spirit to deal with the accuser. When a husband goes to take another woman and his wife finds out, the wife can invoke the spirit of Antoasuo Nyamaa to kill the husband or the concubine or both if they have any sexual intercourse again. Also, if a husband accuses a wife of indulging in extra-marital affairs and the wife thinks the allegation is unfounded, she can also invoke that spirit to deal with the husband. If it happens that the wife is guilty of the offence, the spirit of the river can kill her. On the other hand, if she is innocent, the spirit can kill the husband. It is believed that, the stomach of the victim will be swollen and there will be general body swelling leading to death.

There are instances where a curse could be placed but the effect will not manifest, and this occurs when the person who invoked the curse revokes it. If the person revokes, there will not be any negative impact. If the Duab is not revoked the same day and a day elapses, then the curse will have to be revoked at the shrine of Antoasuo Nyamaa. If the spirit is well-pacified, the accursed gets his freedom, if not, the person dies miserably. Normally, Duab is mostly associated with women than men. If the curse is invoked, and the person dies, and his or her family finds out the cause of the death, then they will have a bone to pick with the perpetrator. The family can bar the perpetrator from attending the funeral and that marks the commencement of an antagonism. It will be a name tagging on the accuser and if he/she dares attend the funeral, it will be disastrous. Duab has been an issue which continues to separate families, though the assumption and the accusation can sometimes be baseless and unfounded, and there may not be any empirical evidence to substantiate its truthfulness. Sometimes somebody dies and it is attributed to the invocation of Duab. A visit to the shrine at Antoa revealed so many instances of general body swellings that have affected victims of those circumstances. An interview with some of the affected persons who wanted to remain anonymous attested to this fact.

## 5.2 ***Akan concept of Witchcraft***

The practice of witchcraft is a common belief predominantly among African societies. The Akans, like other African societies believe in witchcraft. The Webster's Dictionary defines witchcraft as the act or instance of employing sorcery: a magical rite or technique, especially with malevolent intent. It is also referred to as the practice of black magic, the use of spells and the invocation of spirits (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2013). Pritchard (1937) views witchcraft as the innate inherited ability to cause misfortune or death. Debrunner's concept of witchcraft is the idea of some supernatural power of which man can also be possessed, and which is used exclusively for evil and antisocial purposes (Debrunner, 1959; Sargent 1988). However, the Akan concept of witchcraft is not used exclusively for evil and antisocial

purpose. Witchcraft or “*bayie*” is often used for evil, but it can also be used for good purposes.

Etymologically, *bayie* is derived from *ba* (child) and *yi* (to take away) (Christaller 1933). Thus, put together, *bayie* conveys the idea of the person who takes away or kills a child. Here, *bayie* is portrayed as an inherent potency internalized in some fortunate human beings as part of their personality.

The acquisition of witchcraft varies but the commonest of it all is through heredity. Such witches are thought to be very powerful. Another means is when a dying member of one’s family decides to leave it behind. It can also be acquired through the womb. At night, it is believed that their *akra* (plural for soul) leave their physical bodies in sleep and fly off to meetings (Onyinah, 2002). According to Sargent (1988) witchcraft is not only associated with the aged, but also children. It was also believed that twins were endowed with these supernatural powers (Wendy 1979).

During our data collection period, we heard several instances of wives allegedly using their witchcraft powers to kill their husbands. In one instance from our respondent at Ayeduase, a woman whose two husbands had died was married to another man who was advised by her sisters to stay away from that woman. She was alleged to be a witch who used her powers to kill men and possess their property. The man did not heed to the advice and when he also died the woman was accused of using her witchcraft to kill him and she was not allowed to take part in the funeral. When some of our respondents were asked why a witch may kill her husband, the response was that some of them breach trust in their husbands who they thought might share their estate with their rival. After convincing them to make a will for them, they use their powers to kill them, lest they change their minds. Others can use their witchcraft powers to charm their husbands to be committed to their plight only. Witches operate in a mysterious ways which the mind cannot fathom easily. They are said to operate spiritually and there were several unsubstantiated instances of this cited by some of our respondents. They can cause accident, disease and natural catastrophe. They are said to operate in the night on trees and in dilapidated buildings.

### 5.3 ***The Akan System of Inheritance***

This System of inheritance is the means through which properties and stools are passed from one generation to the other. In Ghana, two main systems of inheritance are practised; the matrilineal system of inheritance – where properties are inherited through the female descent, and the patrilineal system of inheritance – where properties are inherited through the male line. Usually, the various ethnic groups in Ghana practise only one type of the inheritance system. The Akans, however, practise both. Among the Akuapems, the patrilineal system is practised while the Asantes, Fantes among others, practise the matrilineal system of inheritance (Sarpong, 2002).

The practice of the matrilineal system of inheritance meant that sister, nephews and nieces mattered most to a man than his own children and in case of death, maternal brother came first followed by nephews, then sisters and nieces (Brookman-Amissah, 1986). This system was not without problems and had serious implications for child-parent relationship. The children although oriented toward matrilineage, had obligations towards the patrilineage. In strictly traditional pattern, the role of the mother was crucial that, upon her death, the most vital link with the *abusua* – family was lost. Therefore, the saying, “*Wo na wu a na w’abusua asa*” – ‘if your mother dies, then your family is finished’ confirms such setback. Also, since children do not inherit the properties of the father, they are in most cases ejected from their father’s residence on his demise.

Contemporary Akan societies have seen some changes where children can inherit the property of their father. However, in traditional leadership succession, the matrilineal inheritance remains in use. It is against this background that some men, in spite of their limited resources try their best to extend their fortunes to some extended members of their family. However, due to the economic hardship in the country, coupled with urbanization and modernity, the catering of the extended family has become an issue of willingness, and not a responsibility. This has brought the problem of contempt and antagonism between the two sides. Members of the extended family show lukewarm attitude during funeral preparation, ensuring they do not incur debts. The burden then falls on the deceased’s nuclear family and the nuclear side becomes aggrieved and antagonize the extended side.



## 6 Case Studies

During our data collection session, the following instances were gathered and used as case studies in this respect: A man in one of the villages of the Ashanti Region in the Afigya Sekyere West District died. He had lived his life in the city with his children and wife. The family complained that before he married at the age of thirty (30), his parents educated him up to the university level. He secured a lucrative job but none of his extended family members benefitted from his fortunes. He was so much committed to his nuclear family only. He had also educated his children to the university level and made a will that his house in the city should be given to his wife and children. He died at the age of sixty-seven (67) and the family decided not to make any expenses on his funeral. During his pre-funeral discussions, the family told his children that they intended burying him in a week time. The children became infuriated but they were told if they could keep the body in the morgue for even a year and were prepared to foot the bill, the family had no problem with them. The children who thought it would be humiliating to bury their cherished father within that short time had to consent to that. The father was therefore buried after three-months. The family deliberately did that to burden them with the mortuary bill.

In almost all Akan societies, it is demeaning to bury a relative within a short time like that unless it is under special medical condition. Normally, that treatment is meted out to the poor and the outcast but an ample time is accorded to a man with high social standing. In some instances, some dead bodies are kept in the morgue for six months or more and that demonstrates how prestigious the deceased and his family are. This happens when the deceased has children abroad who would like to witness the befitting burial of their father or mother.

The next strategy the family adopted to overburden the dead man's wife and children with the funeral expenses was that, the family decided to lay him in state in a dilapidated family house which was not cemented. The mother and her children saw that as an affront to the deceased since sympathizers from all walks of life were expected at the funeral. They had to renovate the family house at a huge cost. The children also bore the cost of the casket and other funeral expenses. We were told that there was torrential rainfall on both the Saturday and Sunday of the funeral which left a huge debt that had to be settled by the mother and her children. According to the children of the deceased, they had never spoken to or called any of their father's relatives and vowed never to be intimate with any of them. When the head of that family was contacted to give his version of the incident, he frankly said that they did that in order not to incur any loss on a man they had never benefitted from.

Our second respondent in the same District briefed us on a man with a university degree who lived all his life with his wife and children in the city. He neglected his extended family and concentrated on the welfare of his nuclear family. He travelled to Nigeria with his wife where he taught in so many secondary schools and built a house in the woman's hometown. The man's elder sister, who was our respondent in this respect, told us that her brother had not been on speaking terms with her for almost forty years for no apparent reason. He once made a derogatory statement that he would not use his money to take care of a useless man's children, referring to the children of his brother-in-law. However, a misunderstanding ensued between him and his wife and his wife and children beat him up and ejected him from their house.

During his retirement, the wife sued him to claim part of his retirement benefits to take care of their child who was still in school. It later became necessary for him to move to his family house in the village where he died after two years. Out of fear that the family might maltreat them, the wife and her children shamefully could not attend his funeral and according to our informant, the man's family have neither seen nor heard from either the wife or the children since then. In another interview, a man narrated how he divorced his wife prompting her to forcibly send their four children to live with him. According to him, the youngest was then five years old whilst the eldest was twelve. He took care of them up to the university level and sold his cocoa farm to support the eldest to further his education abroad. The eldest managed to take his other three siblings and their mother abroad and neglected the father.

According to our informant who is the brother of the man who had then passed on, two of his late brother's children once came to Ghana from the United States of America and visited their father.

That time, the father was in a critical condition battling with diabetes, hypertension, and prostate cancer. He pleaded with them to help him buy some prescribed medicine but one of them retorted that they had spent all their money on the maintenance of a house they had bought for their mother at East Legon in Accra. Perhaps, the children put up this sadist behaviour as a revenge on their mother's behalf. On hearing this, their father developed severe headache and they rushed him to the hospital. His temperature was very high and he had to be admitted. Some few years later, the man died, and the children decided to take part in the funeral but the family angrily rejected them. The children secured an injunction on the funeral, and the dead body was kept in the morgue for one year until the court ruled that the children should be part of the funeral ceremony. Two of our research team who had been briefed on imminent negative consequences on that funeral were there to observe and according to them, there was an uncontrollable conflict between the two families at the funeral ground and it took the intervention of the police to calm them down. Since then, we have been told that both sides of the families have not reconciled.

The fourth case study was about a man who married a woman and had four children with her. There was a conflict between them and during settlement time, the man told his family that his wife who was gainfully employed did not give him supper with the reason that the daily household money the man gave her could cater for only breakfast. Meanwhile, the man was responsible for the payment of the children's school fees. There was a separation and after three years, the man died and the family vowed not to allow the wife to perform the widowhood rites. She threatened an injunction because according to her, there was no evidence that the deceased divorced her and the family reluctantly allowed her to take part in the funeral. After the funeral, the wife and the family of the deceased litigated over a house the man had built for four years until a judgment was given in favour of the woman. We were told that both sides have not been on speaking terms since then. These case studies, among other unsubstantiated accusations that some women, either spiritually or physically killed their husbands were some of the data we gathered.

## 7 Findings and Discussion

The numerous interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations undertaken by the researchers yielded the following findings and they are analyzed as follows:

Funerals are conducted to honour the dead, and to pray for their eternal rest but some unscrupulous family members have converted it to income generating business to suit their whims and caprices. Others invest huge sum of money into some funerals, and when they are not able to break even, it degenerates into conflict. Some people, especially men, have neglected the extended family system of Akans and are committed to their nuclear system and that makes some extended family members become aggrieved and show lukewarm and lackadaisical attitude to their funerals. Most of the people we interviewed concerning funeral antagonisms attested to this fact. One of our informants told us how they deliberately dug a grave which was shorter than the coffin they were to use to bury his dead uncle. They had to put the coffin aside to enlarge the grave by destroying part of the inner decorations before it could contain the coffin. According to him, they did that to demean their late uncle who had not assisted the family in any way. It has again been established that most of the funeral feuds are experienced when a man dies but it is not much prevalent when a woman dies.

The Akan superstitious beliefs such as Duab , and Witchcraft have all contributed to funeral antagonisms. Some allegations of witchcraft and Duab , which are not only unscientific, but also baseless and unfounded have all generated funeral conflicts. Most of the instances of Duab were based on the allegations of married men having extra marital affairs with other women. The legitimate wife who sees that as a threat to her marriage invokes a curse and when the man is culpable the deity punishes him to death. When the deceased family becomes privy to that, they antagonize the wife and prevent her from taking part in the funeral. Other findings which were not expressed in the data were on suspicion of a bewitched wife who has used her powers to kill her husband, a woman who maltreats and neglects her husband by not taking care of him during his old age and sickness period, some family heads spending too much on a funeral leaving behind a huge debt which are borne by the children of the deceased. The next finding is when a man dies intestate and his property is litigated

by his external and nuclear family and many others.

We also gathered from our data that in some instances, the opposite occurs but that is in an extreme case. Some men are also prohibited from taking part in their wives funeral based on some of these similar charges levelled against them but it is prevalent with a woman than a man.

## Recommendations

The premium placed on funerals should be discouraged and intensive education should be given to people that ostentatious funeral celebrations are waste of time and resources (Boateng Cole, 2012). There should be a concerted collaboration between government and traditional rulers as well as religious leaders to persuade people from wasting much time and resources on funerals. Arhin (1994) is of the view that, in the olden days when there was nothing like the morgue and other social amenities to raise funeral cost, funeral ceremonies were manageable. This view of Arhin can be used as a bait to educate people. However, the view that funeral ceremonies are cumbersome and for that matter they should be discouraged should also not be countenanced. The emphasis should rather be on flamboyant style of organizing funerals.

Akans should understand that they are not British or Americans who have some social intervention policies that cater for their social life. It must be understood that, the extended family plays a major role in one's upbringing, from his birth till his death. The investment parents make on their children, contributions from siblings and other extended members of the family to bring up a person should be respected and cherished to avoid all these antagonisms. Men should appreciate the role of their family and reciprocate by doing the little they can to appease them. Women should understand that before they were married to a man, his family had catered for him for not less than twenty years, therefore, monopolizing the property of the man by not allowing any family member of the man to stay in their house is totally unacceptable. What sometimes happens is that some women do not want any family member of their husband to stay in their house and this is to avoid interference in private matters. In as much as they are right, it should be looked at with circumspection and tactfulness. This same recommendation is also applicable to men as well.

For this misunderstanding to be resolved, the government also has a role to play. The government should create jobs or the enabling environment for the unemployed so that people will be well-resourced to cater for themselves in other not to depend on the fortunes of their family members. Policy framework to cater for the aged and pensioners should be enhanced to improve people's social lives. Also, people should be encouraged to invest in pension and old age retirement funds. Social lives of some Ghanaians after sixty are very poor if they do not get any assistance from their children. Some parents who have young children invest their meagre retirement benefits into their education and when they become incapacitated and are not assisted, they become aggrieved and that is the more reason why they vent their spleen on their sons and the spouses of their family member

## 8 Conclusion

Funeral ceremonies among the Akan's portray their cultural heritage and for that matter, it should not be discarded or underrated. It should rather be nurtured so that the negative aspect of it will be modified. It is a rich culture that should not give birth to rancor and a crimony. The Akan concept of family amalgamation and co-existence of both the extended and the nuclear family must be enhanced and all family differences that degenerate into antagonism must be eschewed to enable the beauty of funerals and the cultural heritage they portray be relish and embraced by all.

## Authors' Biography

**Emmanuel Antwi Fordjour** is a lecturer at the Department of Language and Communication Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. He had his Master of Philosophy in Ghanaian Language Studies and Bachelor in French and Linguistics from the University of Ghana, Legon. He also holds Bachelor of Communication from the Ghana Institute of Journalism, Accra and Higher National Diploma and Diploma in French from the Kumasi Technical University and University of Cotonou respectfully. He is now pursuing PhD in English Language in the Department of English,

KNUST. He has published articles in the areas of communication, translation and culture. He is a co-author of a book entitled: *Twi Medical Glossary*.

**Osei Yaw Akoto** (PhD) is a lecturer in the Department of English, Faculty of Social Sciences, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. He holds B.A (Hons) in English Language and Philosophy; MPhil and PhD in English Language, all from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. He teaches Research Methods, English for Academic Purposes, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Studies and Pragmatics. His research interest includes Linguistic Landscape, Onomastics, Corpus Linguistics and Academic Discourse. He has published in a number of Scopus-based journals including *WORD* and *Onoma*.

**Maxwell Mpotsiah** is a tutor in the Department of Languages, Baidoo Bonsoe Senior High Technical School, Agona-Nkwanta and teaches English Language and Literature-in-English. He holds Master of Arts in English Language and Bachelor of Education in English Language from the University of Education, Winneba. Currently, he is Master of Philosophy student in English Language from the same university. He has published articles in journals of international repute. His area of interest in research includes English Grammar, Stylistics, Pragmatics, World Englishes, Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, and Literature.

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