Gusii Funerals:

Meanings of Life and Death in an African Community

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INTRODUCTION

The funerals of the Gusii, like those of other African peoples, are occasions for dramatic public statements about the meanings of particular lives and of life in general. This article attempts to explicate those meanings on the basis of observations at Gusii funerals during 1955-1957 and 1974-1976 and interviews conducted then and in 1964. My aim is to describe how Gusii view their own death rituals and to provide a context for understanding the place of these rituals in the personal experience of Gusii individuals.

When I returned to the Gusii in 1974 for a two-year study of infants and their families, I decided to make a special investigation of funerals in order to gain insight into the cultural management of

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grief, loss, and mourning and to complement our research on Gusii interpersonal relationships in the early years. As the fieldwork proceeded, however, I came to realize that Gusii funerals were not only means for dealing with death as social and personal disruption but dramas defining the ultimate meaning of life. Reading an article by Meyer Fortes (1971) and rereading a book by Monica Wilson (1957), while in the field, also helped bring about this realization and deepened my concentration on these issues. But it was the Gusii I worked with who convinced me that funerals could provide a key to their perspective on life and death, expressed in a language of ritual action that all Gusii adults understood but which requires lengthy explanation to outsiders. By eliciting those explanations, attending numerous funerals, and setting what I saw and was told in the context of the Gusii ritual system as a whole, I was able to attain the level of understanding represented by this paper.

Evidence concerning the importance of funerals to Gusii communities and individuals comes from a wide variety of sources. For example, Philip Mayer, writing in 1949, states:

> Every Gusii is conscious of belonging to a group he calls his *abanyamatati,* "people of shaving" (cf. *amatati,* pl. of *ritati,* head-shaving): we shall call this the "mourning group." At the funeral of a member of the group the other members will be distinguishable by their obligation to shave their heads, to divide up and eat the sacrificial animal, and to wear strips of its hide as mourning rings.
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> (The) idea of one-ness among *abanyamatati,* expressed in the joint eating of the funeral sacrifice, finds another reflection in the rules about payment of compensation for killing. The mourning group of a slain man is nominally responsible for payment. [1949:18-19]

As Mayer describes it, and as I found it in 1955-1957, the mourning group is the nuclear patrilineal group in a society organized on patrilineal or agnatic principles. Their role at funerals, particularly collective head shaving, becomes the symbol of their solidarity and mutual obligation.

In 1956, I asked a number of senior Gusii women about the differential treatment of and attitude toward girls and boys:

> Informant A: If a woman has all girls there is no one to bury her.
>
> Informant B: Both boys and girls are good [to give birth to]. Girls are told that boys should eat [more] because they will always be at home. A mother says, "They

[sons] will bury me, but you [daughters] may run off and leave me without the proper cows."

Informant C: Boys are given more food. If the father slaughters a goat, a boy is given three or four ribs, the girl none; she has to eat part of what is given to her mother. A boy is also given more *obokima* [staple porridge]. We want the boy to be stronger; when his mother and father die he will have to bury them.

This concern with burial, which strikes a Westerner as remarkable, has its parallel in other African societies. Among the Edo of the Benin Kingdom in Nigeria, for example, Bradbury (1965) writes:

To die childless, or sonless, is the most dreaded fate, and when one asks: "Why do you want many children?" the reply is often: "So that they may bury me well." The Edo believe that one who is not properly "buried" cannot enter the society of his dead kin and associates. For his survival as a social being he is dependent on the performance of the mortuary ritual by his children. Again and again, at the climax of these rites, one hears the song: "This is what we bear children for." In a sense, the funerary ritual is the most potent symbol of the parent-children relationship as it is ideally conceived in Edo culture. [1965:97-98]

Finally, in 1974 a Gusii schoolteacher who lived in town decided to build his house in the rural area on a pleasantly situated spot within the paternal homestead. When his blind grandfather, who was head of the homestead, heard where the house had been built, he called in his grandson and told him that the spot was not a suitable house site because the ground there was solid rock and would not permit the digging of a grave in which he could be properly buried. Another house was thereupon erected on a site with softer earth.

These examples show that elements of mortuary ritual such as burial and head shaving are invoked by Gusii in situations of group solidarity, parent-child relationship, and house location. They suggest that Gusii funerals should be seen not merely as actions that occur when someone dies, but (in their representational form) as organized principles in the lives of individuals.

THE LOCATION OF FUNERALS

Gusii funerals take place at the home of the deceased. Each action, from dying to posthumous sacrifice, has a customary location regarded by Gusii (in 1976, as earlier) as an essential part of the ritual. The domestic setting has the same kind of relation to a Gusii

funeral that the traditional design of a church, mosque, or synagogue has to the rituals that take place there: *where* the performance takes place is central to its meaning. In this case, however, it is the same house where life has been lived that is the explicit source of meaning at death.

Although a Gusii homestead belongs to a man, each house within it is identified with a married woman (wife, mother, or daughter-in-law of the owner) who cooks, sleeps, and raises her children there. The house itself is divided into two rooms: *enyomba* (also the general word for "house"), which is the woman's room and contains the hearth and sleeping area; and *eero,* her husband's room, where he entertains his guests with beer and food and where rituals such as sacrifice are normally performed. Outside the entrance to *enyomba* is a yard where many routine family activities take place; outside the smaller door to *eero* is (or was) the cattle pen (*obweeri*). (Cattle are explicitly associated with men in Gusii thought.) *Enyomba* as the woman's room is considered the left side of the house; a woman is supposed to die in her normal sleeping place there, lying on her left side, and be buried outside it just beyond the yard. *Eero* is considered the right side of the house, and a man is supposed to die there (though he normally sleeps in his wife's area), lying on his right side, and be buried outside it beyond the cattle pen. (Right is said to be the man's side because he holds his spear in his right hand.) In burial, the woman should remain lying on her left side and the man on his right. Thus, the conceptual division of the house and adjacent external spaces into right and left sections identified with male and female spouses regulates the places and positions of proper death and burial for those spouses.

These are the spatial ideals of Gusii death and burial; persons who die without being spouses are treated as deviations from this model of proper placement. Thus, if an unmarried mother dies at her parents' home, she is buried to the "left" of her mother's house but as far away as possible—at the edge of the river in those areas where traditional plots are intact. The left position accords with her gender and the distance with her status as someone who ought to have left home and died at her husband's homestead. Other deviant cases are described in the next section; here the point is that the location of a burial indicates approximation of the deceased to gender-specific norms of marital status.

Contemporary Gusii take these spatial ideals seriously, even when doing so involves inconvenience, discomfort, and expense. They take pains to assure the proper placement of their own bodies and those of their kin in death and burial. Nowadays Gusii sleep in bed rather than on skins, but a dying man is taken from the bed he usually shares with his wife and placed on the floor of *eero,* so that (as I was told in 1956) he may die "as a warrior, not a woman." In the past, an ailing woman would already have been lying on her proper deathbed, next to the hearth. The declining availability of firewood and greater availability of blankets, however, have led some Gusii to build the kitchen separate from the bedroom, but the kitchen—where the hearth is—is still considered *enyomba* for ritual purposes. Thus the dying woman must be moved from the bedroom to her kitchen if her death is to take place in *enyomba,* next to her own hearth. Women *are* moved before they die and placed on their left sides. A similar concern for the maintenance of traditional standards of location is shown in the case of burials. Land shortage has forced many Gusii to plant crops right up to the yard on the "left" side and even closer on the "right" side, since cattle pens are rarely needed. Thus crops are growing where burial should take place. When someone dies, however, burial takes precedence, and crops are destroyed to make room for a grave and for the activities that surround it at the funeral. The rites of placement remain absolute.

The salience of these rules for Gusii individuals is most often discussed by adults in terms of the fear that one might die without having a house of one's own. A young man investing his first earnings in the building of such a house, even if another house (usually belonging to an absent older brother) was available for his use and he had no real intention of living at home, usually offers the need for a proper burial as a reason: to be buried properly, no one else's house will do. There are other compelling reasons for a young man to build a house at home he has no immediate prospect of living in: It is a step toward mature adult status; it makes him more attractive to a potential bride (this would be her house); it constitutes a visible claim to his share of the land. Yet I would not discount the concern for a proper burial, largely because it is not independent of these other considerations, all of which involve his increasing rights as a member of homestead and lineage. Burial is the final consideration that subsumes the immediate goals and can stand for them in speech. In discussing the initial phases of marriage, as in discussions

of parent-child relations, burial is the condensed symbol of valued goals—the ultimate one that represents all the others. To die without burial (as sometimes happened on the battlefield) is *emuma,* an abomination, a curse that will bring afflictions to one's homestead and descendants for generations. To die without a house to be buried near is to end life as an incomplete person whose status had not reached that plateau of maturity signified by the establishment of a marital household.

What does in fact happen when a Gusii adult dies without a house of his or her own? In May 1976, an 80-year-old woman, virtually blind but active as a ritual practitioner, died unexpectedly. Long-standing economic disputes among her sons and their belief (widely shared in the community) that she was a witch had resulted the previous year in her house being dismantled, the grass roof sold for cash, and the land on which it stood planted with crops. She was living in the house of an absent grandson at the time of her death. Customary responsibility for the old woman's burial fell to her oldest grandson, who was ready to do his duty but perplexed at her houselessness. The issue was resolved by a discussion at which three friends and neighbors of the deceased—an elderly man and an elderly widow from agnatically related homesteads, and a respected elder of less advanced years from a nearby homestead of another clan—argued that a house must be built for her. They were able to draw upon customary precedents for unmarried men who had died houseless; a small structure called *egesamo* was built for purposes of the mortuary ritual to represent the house "she would have had in marriage."

Egesamo simulates the residential house at a funeral. The word is derived from *egesa,* referring to a small hut men used to build for themselves at home so they could be alone (i.e., apart from their wives) with their cattle. As a word and concept, *egesa* is derived from *egesaraate,* "cattle camp," where warriors lived away from their families with the cattle herds before 1913, when the colonial government outlawed the cattle camps as a source of interclan violence. Nostalgic for their lives in the cattle camps, elders prior to 1913 and other married men after that time, built huts for themselves at home which were named after the cattle camp and had some of the same functions. When a house had to be built for the funeral of a houseless person, this verbal and conceptual prototype was drawn upon to designate a small, impermanent structure

built for a more specialized purpose than an ordinary house (*enyomba*); hence *egesamo*.

The old woman died at 1:00 P.M.; by 11:00 A.M. of the following day the *egesamo* for her burial had been built, and her grandsons were digging a grave a few feet from its front door (on its "left," as the Gusii view it). Built of grass on a framework of saplings, the hut was located on the spot where her house had been. Her woven-wood drying trays (*chingambo,* sing. *orwambo*) for drying grain had been used for some of the interior walls and ceiling. Before noon, her corpse was placed in a coffin and brought from the house where she died through the "left" door of the grass hut and set down there. Her eldest grandson dug a hole for a small fireplace (*egetukora*), and his wife brought embers from the old woman's last cooking fire to light a fire in the new hut. They spent that night after the burial in the hut to make sure the fire did not go out. (Its extinction would have been a curse and resulted in affliction of the descendants.) They brought in the old woman's possessions (a blanket, her smoking pipe, and her divination apparatus) and hearthstones for the fireplace, and sacrificed a goat, sharing the meat and millet beer with a neighboring kinsman and his wife, who sat outside the hut. The fire was kept going for a day after the burial, the hut preserved for some days until a second sacrifice was performed. During the lamentation that followed the burial, a granddaughter of the deceased publicly criticized the old woman's sons (including the accuser's own father) for failing to provide her with a house to be buried by, prior to her death. This led to an inconclusive quarrel about who was to blame. The disgrace remained, but ritual restitution had been done.

Thus when a Gusii adult dies houseless, a ritual hut must be constructed on the spot where the house was or would have been, the corpse placed in it before burial, and rituals of fire and sacrifice performed to consecrate the hut as a symbolic house. This rule is invariant in its application and cannot be abrogated even when, as in the case described, the deceased is considered a witch and has not been the object of her children's affection. In that case, a good deal of money and effort were expended to give her a proper burial. Without the construction of an *egesamo,* there would have been no point of reference from which to position the grave—which in Gusii terms makes burial impossible or at least hopelessly improper. With the construction of *egesamo,* it was possible to place the grave and

the corpse on its way to the grave, in its "left" position appropriate to a woman.

One of the most interesting aspects of these spatial rules is the necessity that each adult have a unique location at burial, one that is not shared with any other adult of the same sex. Hence each man must have a house that was built for him and each woman a house in which she has cooked as his wife; no other available house in the homestead can serve as a substitute point of reference for their graves. The individual identity of the adult is at stake here. No matter how much emphasis there is on the corporate identity of the homestead and the generational continuity of the lineage in other parts of the funeral, each person who has reached maturity is entitled to a unique house-burial site as a minimal marker of individuality.

The Gusii grave itself is not marked. On the contrary, informants emphasized the need to smooth down the earth after burial so that its location would be invisible to the witches, who are believed to exhume corpses and eat them. Thus the house is at the time of death and thereafter the only visible marker of the deceased as an individual. For the Gusii, whose bodies are literally incorporated at death into their homesteads and who see their descendants as their primary evidence of having lived, the house is an indispensable symbol of personal identity as an adult individual at the time of interment. It is also the setting for the drama of the funeral itself.

THE FUNERAL CEREMONY: 1956 AND 1976

In describing the sequence of ritual action of the Gusii funeral, I shall begin with an overview of the ceremony as it was in the 1950s and as it changed over the next two decades. Later sections will describe variations according to social status and the circumstances of death, and then the place of emotional expression in funerals.

During 1955-1957, funerals in the Nyansongo area approximated closely what informants described as their precolonial form. This can be divided into four phases: (1) death, (2) burial, (3) the public gathering, and (4) subsequent rituals.

1. *Death.* When a person was thought to be near death, he was put into *eero* if a man or left in *enyomba* if a woman—in both cases on the floor so that the death would not contaminate the bed and make

it unsuitable or later use. Deathbed confessions were expected from persons suspected of witchcraft, theft, or other serious offenses that might bring afflictions to survivors if restitution was not made. Women in the family started wailing in a stylized singsong before death occurred, which served to notify neighbors that someone was dying. After death, the wailing became louder, and kinsmen were summoned to dig the grave. The corpse was placed on the gender-appropriate side with knees flexed; white clay was put on the face and green leaves on the body. Other treatment of the corpse before burial was contingent on special status attributes and is described below.

2. *Burial.* The digging of the grave began as soon as the appropriate kin arrived. The preferred person to take charge was the deceased son's son (if there were several, the eldest grandson) but it could be a son if the grandsons were too young or a nephew (brother's son or husband's brother's son) or brother if no son were available. The role of the son's son in giving his grandparents a proper burial was (and is) cherished by elderly Gusii; while an absolute obligation, it gave the grandson a special claim on the grandfather's *emonga* (personal land, undivided among his wives), livestock, and other property. Other kinsmen, usually agnatically related neighbors of the same generation, helped the grandson or son dig the grave. If these neighbors failed to arrive, it was a sign they believed the deceased to be a thief whose death was caused by sorcery medicine that would affect them if they touched the corpse. This is one of several instances in which attendance and nonattendance at funeral rites carried with it a great deal of unspoken meaning.

The first break in the earth was made by the hoe of the eldest grandson or son, whoever was in charge. Men whose wives were pregnant were excused from grave-digging on the grounds that the unborn might be adversely affected. Further, pregnant women and their husbands were prohibited from touching the earth of the grave, even after the grave was filled in, for the same reason. The depth of graves was variable and dependent on how seriously it was suspected that the deceased was killed by witches. If the suspicions were serious, the grave would be deeper, more than ten feet; if there were no credible suspicions, it might be as shallow as six feet. If someone was killed by witchcraft, the corpse was believed to be in

greater danger of being exhumed and eaten by the murderers but could be protected by greater depth.

The corpse was carried from the house through the door of the gender-specific room in which death had occurred to the grave on the side of the house, and was lowered into the grave and put on its right or left side according to sex. At this point, if the elders of the local patrilineage seriously suspected witchcraft, then the visceral cavity was cut open in the grave while the elders inspected it from above to see if internal organs (spleen, liver, intestines) were swollen, indicating the effects of witchcraft. It was believed that the swelling of organs due to witchcraft would, if the visceral incision were not performed, continue after burial and result in a crack in the surface of the grave, leading the witches to their prey. With the "pressure" relieved by the incision, the body was closed and the grave filled in.

Throwing the first handful of earth into the grave had a special significance. It was usually the grandson or son in charge of the digging who did it, but if the preferred kinsman was a child, too small to dig, nevertheless he threw the first earth into the grave although others had done the digging. Other close agnates of the deceased could also throw earth into the grave after the first handful. Women did not unless asked specifically to do so. This happened when the deceased had several wives; had one of them hesitated to throw the earth (fearing subsequent affliction) it would have been assumed she had committed adultery, and a special sacrifice would have been required. Once this ritual throwing of earth was over, the diggers filled up the grave, stamping down the earth as they did. When they were finished, a prepubescent girl had to bring them water to wash their hands and legs with, so that they would not carry earth from the grave away with them; in bringing it, she was forbidden to turn around.

When the deceased was a married man, the exterior roof-stick (*egechuri*) was removed from the top of conical roof of the house shortly after his death or during the digging of his grave. This stick symbolized male authority over the women of the house and was later replaced when she took a leviratic husband (*omochinyomba*). If the deceased's wife had undergone the final wedding ceremony (*enyangi*) at which iron rings (*ebitinge*) had been put on her ankles, these were also removed during the grave-digging. These two acts carried the message that a married man had died and his marital

relationships, though by no means dissolved, were fundamentally altered.

There was supposed to be a cessation of mournful noise during the grave-digging, interment, and filling-in, but it was expected that the women would not be able to stop themselves from wailing during that time. Once the grave was filled in, however, all expressions of grief were permissible. Widows of the deceased were expected to tear off their clothes, cover themselves with ashes, and put on articles of the dead husband's clothing as they lamented his death and danced on his grave. A widower was also expected to remove his shirt, put ashes on his body, and tie some of his wife's clothing around his waist at this time, a practice called *ogokobania*. The grave-diggers were supposed to be the first to cry at the grave, but there were usually other close kin present by this time and no rule of precedence was followed. Except when they were dancing on the grave or throwing themselves upon it in grief, women and men clustered separately during this period following the burial, engaging in conventional expressions of grief described below. Kin of the same sex clustered around the bereaved spouse, parent or child of the deceased in order to give comfort in the hours after death. Bereaved women (wife, mother, daughter, sister of the deceased) were expected to mourn continuously on this and the next day, becoming completely exhausted.

When night fell after the burial, a sacrifice had to be performed, "a goat to cool the house" (*embori yogokendia enyomba*). This was explicitly interpreted by informants as intended to placate the deceased so that his anger would not result in afflictions for survivors in the homestead. The goat sacrificed was of the same sex as the deceased. It was roasted with the skin on and the whole thing eaten on the spot; unlike other sacrifices, the meat was not allowed to be taken home. Sometimes another goat was sacrificed the next morning, "so that the dead man will not blame them and send bad spirits to his living kin." "A dead man's brothers and sisters stayed in the house during the first night after the burial to give the widows comfort and make sure they do not kill themselves."

3. *The Public Gathering.* It was expected that news of the death would have reached the majority of the deceased's kin on the day of the burial. Members of the deceased's *risaga* (the community of neighboring homesteads recognizing reciprocal work obligations) abstained from cultivating their fields that day. They and more

distantly located kin would come the following day to participate in the mourning. If the deceased were a man, men would bring their cattle and their weapons to the funeral; women would bring food, since widows were forbidden to cook. The deceased's personal possessions were displayed on the grave. For a man it would be his wooden stool, his walking stick, the ankle rings his wife had removed the previous day, and (in 1956-1957) articles of Western clothing (suit jacket, trousers, hat). At some men's funerals their Western-style beds were put on the grave too. For a woman it would be her cooking pots, her stool, her smoking pipe (Gusii women smoked tobacco in pipes), some iron bracelets, and necklaces.

Large numbers of people came to pay their respects in conventional ways, stayed for a while and then left. Those with closer relationships to the deceased or the immediate surviving kin stayed throughout the day. At a man's funeral, herds of cattle were driven over the grave, often trampling and consuming crops in adjacent fields, as their owners made a display of menacing unseen enemies with poised spears, which they sometimes stuck into nearby trees. All the while they were shouting war cries, and men accompanying them blew horns and whistles to add to the din. Informants said this custom was intended to show those (unidentified) enemies who might have brought about the death of this man that he had warlike supporters who were prepared to fight them. They were in effect giving him a "warrior's farewell" like a 21-gun salute rather than seriously intending to identify his killers and avenge his death. Nevertheless, in precolonial times, warriors had their bellicosity so stirred up by this ritual drama that they sometimes conducted serious unprovoked raids against other Gusii clans on their way home from a funeral. There was no conscious belief that the deceased was killed by the people who were attacked after the funeral. On the contrary, these acts of violence were more likely to occur at the funerals of old men who had clearly died at home of conditions associated with old age. Gusii informants who participated in these raids said the mood established at the funeral impelled them to conduct a raid on their enemies.

Older men and those without cattle paid their respects to the deceased by facing the grave, often a group of men together, and singing an "o-o-o" sound which they held for as long as they could; then they dispersed and regathered farther away from the grave. All men did this at the funeral of a woman. Women, on the other hand,

wailed at great length, tears pouring down their cheeks, singing improvised lamentations (described below) and dancing on and around the grave. While male participation in the public mourning was brief and circumscribed, that of women went on for hours, with the widows and the mother continually in evidence near the grave. Each woman did her own slow, shuffling dance uncoordinated with the others. If there was a musician playing a Gusii lyre (*obokano*), however, then the women were likely to dance in a circle near the grave, sometimes joined by the men. Apart from such dancing, however, men and women invariably clustered separately at funerals, and their activities at and around the grave were uncoordinated with each other.

This public mourning could go on all day and even on subsequent days as kinsmen and friends who lived farther away came to participate. There were three other rituals that immediate kin had to conduct on that day: head shaving, turning the stool (or cooking pot) upside down, and another animal sacrifice. At midday the heads were shaved. This is *amatati,* mentioned above as the symbol of communion for the *abanyamatati,* the nuclear agnatic kin group. The shaving group, described by Gusii as "people of one grandfather," actually consisted, as Mayer (1949:19) pointed out, of the sons and grandsons of a deceased man, his father and his grandfather and their sons and grandsons; there were different assortments of kin for a woman (including her husband and mother) or a child. In addition, the widows of a man must have their heads shaved, and in the case of polygynists, this was usually done on the grave itself. If a widow had committed adultery, she had to confess at this time or "her children would die"; once she confessed she was shaved on the grave and a ram was sacrificed.

Once the head shaving was done, the personal possessions of the deceased were turned upside down on the grave (*ogotureka chingambo*); this particularly applied to a man's stool and a woman's cooking pots, though anything else that had a distinguishable top and bottom might also be inverted. While these articles remained inverted, widows of the deceased must not go far from the homestead, cross a river, wash their bodies or their clothing; a widower was under the same restrictions. That evening, another goat was sacrificed: *embori yamatoronge,* the "goat of the portions." The meat of this goat was distributed to all the houses in the homestead,

to permit their residents to resume cooking, something they had stopped as soon as death occurred. In its metaphorical meaning, *amatoronge,* designating portions of food shared from a common food basket (*ekee*), here refers to the several houses (*chinyomba*) of the single homestead. Each house was likened to a part taken from a whole, emphasizing the unity of the whole without denying its segmentation; the message was similar to *e pluribus unum.*

4. *Subsequent Rituals.* With the resumption of cooking in the homestead of the deceased and the completion of public mourning by visitors, the most public aspects of the funeral were over, but the bereaved spouses remained in a liminal state initiated by the inversion of the deceased's possessions. This could be terminated as soon as another sacrifice called *okogororokia chingambo* ("standing things up straight") was performed. Since this sacrifice required the brewing of millet beer and the providing of a feast for neighboring kinsmen, it could not take place before a week or two had passed and was more likely to be postponed for a period of months. One knowledgeable informant said he had never known a widow who had performed it before two months, another said it was frequently done after grass had begun growing on the grave. It was understood that poor families would take longer to gather resources for the feast. The feast was a joyous celebration, explicitly marking the end of sorrow, the end of restrictions on widowed spouses, the resumption of normal life and the establishment of a widow's leviratic relationships. It can be seen as ending the customary mourning period for spouses, the specific length of which could be adjusted by a spouse on the basis of numerous socially acceptable conditions.

The sacrifice took place in the daytime. With neighboring kinsman in attendance, a goat of the same sex and roughly equivalent in age to the deceased was led into the gender-appropriate room of the house, then to the grave ("as the dead person was") and back to *eero* in the house, where all sacrifices are performed. After the goat was ritually slaughtered, the inverted possesions were turned right side up. This lifted the restrictions on widowed spouses. The kinsmen assembled, ate and drank; bits of the goat's stomach contents were smeared on their foreheads and chests and they were given bracelets cut from its hide. They then left the widow (in the case of a deceased man) with her leviratic husband (brother or ortho-cousin to the deceased). The *egechuri* stick was then replaced on the roof of the house. Life returned to normal.

But there were more sacrifices to be performed. Each married son of a deceased man or woman had to perform a sacrifice in his own house, called "bringing the patriarch (matriarch) into the house," *okorenta omogaaka (omongina) nyomba.* Previous sacrifices had been performed in the house of the deceased, but these subsequent ones were designed as offerings from the houses of the sons to protect them from the potential ill will of the dead person's spirit. Later, each of the married paternal grandsons (sons' sons) had to do the same: "bringing grandfather (grandmother) into the house," *okorenta esokoro (magokoro) nyomba.* When this had been done the spirit of the deceased would have been placated by every house of a married person in the homestead he or she left behind. That marked the end of the normal series of rituals occasioned by one death. When a prosperous old man died, leaving numerous married sons and grandsons, the number of sacrifices required was great and so was the likelihood that some of them would be neglected. It was expected that grandsons would postpone this duty for years. But if afflictions struck during that time, the diviner (*omoragoori*) would attribute it to *chisokoro,* "grandfathers," and would specify the sacrifice that must be done to achieve reconciliation with the neglected spirit. The widespread neglect of sacrificial obligations to one's grandfathers became the primary link between the ancestor cult and the Gusii system of diagnosis and healing managed by diviners.

This account, detailed as it may seem, is no more than a skeletal outline of the Gusii funeral in the middle 1950s, but it can serve as a baseline for comparing with the funerals observed 20 years later. In the interim, the Gusii of the area in which I worked were more intensely missionized, especially by the Roman Catholic Church. By 1974, only a handful of persons remained unaffiliated with that church or the Seventh-Day Adventists. (A few individuals were members of the Swedish Lutheran Church, Church of God, or Pentecostal Assemblies of God.) Schoolgoing, which was rare in 1957, was virtually universal in 1974, and a substantial number of adults had been to secondary school. Many in the area had lived and worked in big cities, read newspapers, and listened to the radio. They seemed to aspire to "modern" life-styles defined by Western models, which were propagated by the mass media, church, and government. Thus there was every reason to expect that funerals in the area would reflect the effects of social change.

Gusii funerals changed in some respects between 1957 and 1974 and remained the same in many others, I shall review changes in the normative script for the funeral ceremony against the background of the four phases already outlined. The biggest change is in the temporal organization of the four phases. Burial no longer follows rapidly upon death but is postponed until the public gathering can take place. Thus the corpse remains unburied for an extra day. This seems to be an accommodation to the fact that immediate kin who should be involved in the burial are now likely to be working hundreds of miles away and learn of the death over the telephone or through the Gusii language broadcast of the Voice of Kenya radio station; they must be given time to return. Employment also means that many are under pressure to return to work as soon as possible. Thus the phases of burial and the public gatherings are now coterminous, with extended kin and acquaintances attending the burials of persons who in the past they would have mourned only after burial had taken place. This turns the burial into a spectacle and the central drama of the public gathering—which is quite a difference from the past. The other changes can be discussed in relation to each of the four phases.

1. *Death.* An increasing number of Gusii die away from home, in the Kisii Hospital or at their places of work, but every effort is made to bring the corpse home as soon as possible. Talcum powder has replaced white clay as a facial dressing for the corpse. Men who are bringing a corpse home from the hospital in a pickup truck sometimes put talcum powder on their own faces and silently wave the branches of green leaves that are lain on the corpse.

Coffins, which were never seen at Gusii funerals in the 1950s, are now universal; they are made at home by some of the same men who dig the grave. As soon as the coffin has been built, the corpse is put into it on the correct side, in the proper room of the house. Those who arrive for the funeral before the burial are ushered into that room to view the corpse, something that was not possible when burial followed quickly after death. The coffin is of course the result of Western and Christian influence, but its universal adoption seems to be connected with the new practice of viewing the corpse and having a large number of persons attend the burial. In other words, the coffin can be seen as the response by the immediate kin to the more public nature of the funeral; they are showing an audience of concerned outsiders that they are taking proper care of the corpse

according to new standards of care. We can only speculate as to why these particular new standards were adopted. One plausible speculation is that since the grave itself was conceptualized as affording protection for the corpse from witches, with graves being dug deeper if the threat of witchcraft seemed more imminent, the coffin could have been welcomed as a Western invention that would afford an additional layer of protection for the corpse. I shall return to this interpretation below.

2. *Burial.* Burials were conducted in 1974–1976 as described for the earlier period, though before a larger gathering and with coffins. The postmortem examination of the viscera when witchcraft is suspected, for example, continues and was performed at a funeral (of an eight-year-old girl) attended in 1975. The coffin was lowered into a grave 12 feet in depth on ropes made from the cornstalks uprooted to make room for the grave. The coffin was pried open for the operation and nailed shut when the examination was over. Other prescriptive norms concerning who digs the grave and who throws earth into it remain as before. The major new element of ritual is the Christian liturgy. At Catholic funerals, a local catechist reads prayers and leads the Catholic kin in reciting them, as the grave is being filled in. The catechist and others stand at and around the grave at this time. The Seventh-Day Adventists do the same but hold a public meeting with eulogies, prayers, and other speeches some distance from the grave just prior to the burial. In contrast to the Catholic pattern, in which the Christian prayers are simply inserted into a preexisting ritual, the Seventh-Day Adventists create a Westernized occasion, with many attending in their best clothes, sitting on chairs facing the deacons and other leaders who address them and lead them in prayer before the burial takes place. Once the grave is filled in, however, the expressions of grief are much the same at all Gusii funerals, and the dancing, singing, and lamentation remain the same as in the past.

3. *The Public Gathering.* Although the cattle drive for the funerals of men still occurs in some parts of Gusiiland, most of the area in which we worked had no sizable herds, and men no longer make a display of military activity at funerals. They do blow whistles, however, and some bring portable radios with the volume turned up, to add to the noise of phonographs already blaring near the grave and create a din like that of old. Apart from a few with a special relationship to the deceased, men cluster separately from

women after burial, often drinking alcoholic beverages. The women continue to behave more individually in their emotional expressions, as described below. Those attending a funeral nowadays usually give small sums of money to the bereaved, in place of the food women used to bring.

The sacrifice "to cool the house" is still done the night after the burial, but that now means after the public gathering rather than before it. Goats were sacrificed for two women who died at 75 and 80 years of age in 1975 and 1976. In the case of men, however, it has become conventional to sacrifice a white cock instead of a goat (the ritual is then called *etwoni yogokendia nyomba,* "a cock to cool the house"), and this was done for all men whose funerals were attended in the 1970s, ranging from a 28-year-old bachelor to and 87-year-old elder. Like the goat roasted in its skin, the cock for this ritual is not cooked in the usual way; its throat is cut and the innards removed, but the bird is put in the fire with the feathers on. When the feathers have burnt off and the chicken is roasted, the participants eat the meat by itself without other food; they must not chew the bones. As with the goat, they must finish the meat there and take none home. Informants said this sacrifice is done for all men who have reached marital age but neglected nowadays for young women.

Since the public gathering now takes place on the day of the burial, before the sacrifice of cooling the house, the head shaving is no longer temporally associated with the gathering. It is done as in the past, on the following day (now after most visitors have gone).

The second sacrifice, *embori yamatoronge,* is still done for all adults and the possessions are overturned as before.

4. *Subsequent Ritual.* The third sacrifice, "standing the things up straight," is still done after a variable length of time, but the fourth and fifth, "bringing the father (and then the grandfather) into the house," are now frequently postponed until afflictions force the son or grandson to a diviner who diagnoses them as due to the "grandfathers" and prescribes the kind of goat or chicken to be sacrificed.

Gusii funerals, then, have changed over a period of two decades: The burial and public gathering take place on the same day rather than on successive days, making the burial later and more public than before. Some specific elements have been added (coffins, Christian prayers), some dropped (the cattle drive), some substituted (talcum powder for white clay, radio music for war cries, a cock for a goat), some neglected (the final sacrifices). The central

narrative, however, the "story" that the funeral tells about the deceased in relation to the survivors, remains the same.

In this central narrative, the deceased as corpse and spirit is initially portrayed as a potential source of danger to surviving kin. Although the corpse is not invariably feared, contact with it or even with the earth of its grave can be harmful to an unborn child in the womb of a pregnant woman or even a grave-digger's pregnant wife; and if the deceased was killed by retaliatory sorcery, the corpse can spread the ill effects to those who touch it. Further, contact with the corpse in bad faith—the adulterous wife who throws earth into the grave—brings physical harm, even death, to a survivor. In other words, Gusii custom does not entail a generalized fear of contact with the corpse but a belief that death places in a state of jeopardy persons involved with incompleted processes—gestation, retaliation, marital betrayal—and that contact with the corpse will bring completion in the form of death. The corpse as a terminal physical condition seems to represent the possibility that the deceased will quickly resolve unfinished business before burial by terminating the lives of survivors. But this possibility is represented in the corpse as an unwilled, automatic, contagious condition—selective but not intentional.

The portrayal of the deceased as spirit, that is, as the presence for whom sacrifices are performed, brings into focus the intensions and emotional attitudes attributed to a dead person in the Gusii funeral narrative. The deceased is angry and resentful at having died, potentially blaming the survivors for it (regardless of the actual facts) and wanting to wreak vengeance on them. Like the prototypical Gusii adult who has suffered a serious loss (including bereaved persons at funerals), the deceased is portrayed as reacting with a rage that overcomes reason and leads to blame and the desire for vengeance. If the survivors had actually killed the deceased, they would have more to fear—but even if they did not, the facts remain that they are alive and the deceased is dead and that they will benefit from the inheritance; these facts are enough to arouse the deceased's murderous jealousy. Hence the house must be "cooled"—the idiom is one used in Gusii speech for calming an enraged person—by offering the deceased an animal sacrifice on the first night after burial. If this is not done, the spirit of the deceased (*ekerecha*) will turn against his or her own survivors and send disaster to them.

This is a certainty when the deceased is an adult man of any age or an old woman, but the spirits of young women, like their living counterparts, are less powerful, hence less feared if not placated by sacrifice. Thus the fear of the deceased as spirit to whom mortuary sacrifice is offered corresponds to that person's place in the normative distribution of social power by age and sex.

The narrative of the Gusii funeral includes a story of protection. Before the burial, the corpse is seen as potentially harmful in contacts associated with its unfinished business, and measures of avoidance are taken to protect the living against the deceased. In the burial and treatment of the corpse, however, there is the acknowledgment that the dangerous power attributed to the corpse before burial does not endure after burial; the corpse itself needs protection against the dangers of witches, and this is afforded by the optional postmortem operation, the grave, and the coffin. Once the burial is over, attention shifts to protection of the survivors from the anger of the deceased's spirit, and the entire series of sacrifices is explicitly designed to placate the spirit and ward off the disastrous afflictions it might visit upon the survivors. The policy of protection is enacted not only by sacrifice but by the liminal period of restricted activity for the surviving spouse, which makes the resumption of normal activities and the establishment of a new marital relationship more gradual, and therefore more acceptable to the resentful deceased spouse. By marking this period visibly, particularly its end, the community of kin gives support to the widow or widower in relinquishing a deceased spouse to whom proper respects have been paid and initiating a new life with new relationships. In this new situation, each married son and grandson is required to reconcile its "house," that is, family, with the spirit, whose resentment is fading but still dangerous, through a homecoming sacrifice. If this is neglected, the jeopardy of the house is never quite lifted; protective sacrifices will be necessitated at a later time.

This interpretation is one of many possible interpretations of a complex ceremony with multiple layers of meaning. Rather than attempting to decipher all the symbols involved, I have focused on the affects and intentions attributed in Gusii belief to the deceased and the survivors in relation to each other and on the normative prescriptions for action based on these affects and intentions. In the sections that follow, the interpretation is developed further as we ex-

plore variations in funerals occasioned by differing status characteristics of the deceased and the affect that is overtly expressed at Gusii funerals.

VARIATIONS IN FUNERALS

The funerals of married men and women who have become parents and have living children are the prototypes for all Gusii funerals; those of others are publicly marked as deviant. Thus, Gusii funerals vary in treatment of the corpse, location of the grave, number of people attending, and activity at the funeral, in accordance with the social maturity of the deceased and how death occurred. In this section I examine what these variations indicate about Gusii conceptions of life and its premature termination.

Customary prescriptions for preparation of the corpse and grave location explicitly represent the marital and reproductive progress of the dead person insofar as that person fell short of becoming a mature spouse and parent. An unmarried woman is buried far away from the house, though on homestead land, to represent the sense that she would have been buried elsewhere, at the homestead of the husband she never had, if she had lived on. A woman who was married but had no children is buried with a thorn inserted into each nipple because she had had no child to suckle. After the burial, a young chicken, male or female, is trussed and put on her grave "to cry [i.e., mourn] for her" because "she had no children of her own to cry for her." If this were not done, the dead woman would send affliction to the survivors. When a pregnant woman dies, the fetus is removed and put beside her in the coffin. When a young man dies who has been circumcised but is not ready for marriage yet, an *egesamo* hut is built for him, representing the house he would have lived in had he married. When a man of marriageable age dies without having married, he is buried with *egechuri,* a roof-stick, beside him in the grave, representing the status he would have had as a husband with authority over the house of his wife. (This was done for a 28-year-old bachelor in 1976; his books and radio were also put beside him in the coffin, showing his superior education relative to others in his local age-cohort.) Finally, in a somewhat different context, when an old woman dies who has been a diviner (*omoragoori*), the iron bracelets known as *chindege* worn by diviners

must be removed and put beside her corpse. If she were buried wearing the bracelets, as one informant said at the funeral of a diviner, "she might say, 'You put me in a prison with a chain,' and some afflictions would follow."

These prescriptions show that in treatment of the corpse and burial, Gusii perform a drama in which the deceased adult is given a symbolic fulfillment of marital and reproductive goals that had not been attained in life. While these practices give public emphasis to the social immaturity and incompleteness of the deceased, their significance is not as criticism or condemnation. On the contrary, informants left no doubt that these mortuary practices are addressed to the deceased, are seen as yielding to his or her demands, and are performed to prevent the spirit of the dead person from afflicting the survivors. By giving the dead posthumous promotions in the hierarchy of adult statuses based on marriage and parenthood, the survivors hope to protect themselves from the resentment of death before maturity. As in the case of the diviner whose bracelets must be properly removed and put beside her, kin burying a socially immature adult act to alleviate the consequences of an expected resentment.

Attendance at funerary public gatherings during 1974–1976 ranged widely, from a dozen to a thousand. The smallest gatherings were those for infants, the largest (with some notable exceptions discussed below) those of elderly men and women. Thus in a rough way attendance was predictable from the level of social maturity reached by the deceased during his or her lifetime. The infant is formally conceptualized as still sharing the social identity of the mother, who remains alive; the death is a loss for her and those close to her, but is basically a domestic rather than community event. The elderly person, on the other hand, is almost invariably a grandparent and even great-grandparent, thus having reached the most valued status in Gusii society, that of an ancestor, before death. The identity of such a person is also shared but by numerous descendants who have achieved the status of householders themselves, and this in itself defines the funeral as a public event of broad significance in a community organized by kinship. In addition, however, the elderly person has lived a long life in which many other distinctions and widespread social connections may have been accumulated—for a man, leadership in war (before 1908), government, community af-

fairs; for a woman, divination and multiple associations formed through her husband and her children's marriages. All of these connections and associations engender the desire to attend the funeral of an old person, a desire that goes beyond formal kinship obligation and leads to large public gatherings.

In between the extremes of the infant and the octogenarian, there is also a correspondence, but a much more approximate one, between funeral attendance and the social maturity of the deceased. Those who have been initiated into adult status through circumcision, but have died short of parenthood or even marriage (i.e., those cases cited above as requiring special corpse preparation or burial) are likely to have less well attended funerals than established householders with children. The latter funerals are obligatory for neighbors in recognition of mutual obligations of support and cooperation among adult householders of a *risaga* or local community. Attendance at funerals of socially immature adults continues to reflect the social relationships of their parents rather than their own. Thus the funeral of the 28-year-old bachelor previously mentioned was not attended by one major group of closely related neighbors because of a bitter quarrel between them and his parents. Furthermore, the funerals of parents who have borne children bring out many kin and neighbors concerned with the welfare of the children who have lost a parent, particularly their economic future, and this concern leads nowadays to the announcement at the public gathering of a collection of money to help the children. Thus the correspondence between funeral attendance and social maturity for young and middle-aged adults is based less on public evaluations of the amount of maturity achieved by the deceased than it is on the number of ongoing relationships disrupted by the death. Even this approximate correspondence, however, is diminished by the larger gatherings for deaths due to accidents and homicide even when the victims are immature, the smaller gatherings for some socially isolated mature persons, and the variable effects of quarrels between homestead. In other words, for intermediate levels of maturity, many factors other than progress toward more mature status account for the funeral attendance.

There is unmistakable pride in fertility expressed at the funerals of elderly persons who are the ancestors of many living people. At the gathering for a 68-year-old woman, a piece of paper was handed

around which listed her dates of birth, marriage and conversion to Christianity, and then her numbers of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren (males and females separately), with the total number of progeny at the bottom. At other funerals the summation of accomplished fertility is expressed simply by a large attendance known by everyone to be due to the numerous progeny of the deceased as well as his or her other connections. This interest in quantifying a person's fertility is not exclusive to the funeral situation: an old man of our acquaintance, terminally ill but still active, said he liked to sit on his land and count the number of his descendants and their spouses, the number of people he "had" in his homestead, of whom he was the patriarch (and for whom he would be the ancestor after death). He was frank enough to reveal what other old people probably do without divulging, namely, counting his descendants. At a funeral, however, this kind of success can be publicly displayed and celebrated by the survivors without concern about jealousy. The mood of such a funeral is one in which everyone is prepared to participate in the enjoyment of the deceased's success; jealousy is attributed to his enemies rather than to those who come to celebrate.

Fertility epitomizes what the Gusii funeral seems designed to celebrate, but several funerals showed that other factors can account for large attendance. One large gathering occurred for a 40-year-old monogamist whose children were not yet married, but he was a high-ranking civil servant in the government of Kenya, a man who resided in Nairobi as part of the elite that current generations aspire to join. He had also been a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and his funeral was heavily attended by co-religionists, including pupils in uniform from a nearby SDA school. Thus the attendance at this man's funeral reflected not his social maturity accomplished through a reproductive and marital career, but his position in a new world of social status outside of kinship and his membership in a new form of community transcending the lineage.

A massive number of people, perhaps 1,000, gathered for the burial of a young unmarried sailor—but he had been murdered at the coast and was buried at home by the Kenya Navy with full military honors. His murder alone under mysterious circumstances might have been enough to attract a large sympathetic attendance, but the military guard of honor for the corpse, flown in to the rarely

used Kisii airstrip, created a public spectacle of unprecedented proportions. Here again, external recognition compensated for the social immaturity of the deceased in bringing many people to a funeral. Though funeral attendance is generally correlated with the social maturity and fertility of the person who died—in effect, with that person's status as an ancestor for the living—new forms of social recognition outside of the kinship system can constitute equivalent sources of attraction when the deceased is a man of deficient maturity.

The importance of fertility at funerals of women can be illustrated from another kind of variant life history, that of a co-wife who has died without having children. As mentioned above, a childless married woman is thought to be particularly frustrated and resentful at dying in such an incomplete condition. If the bridewealth cattle had been paid for her, her resentment is intensely shared by her parents and their kin, who are responsible for returning the bridewealth in full, since she had borne no children for her husband's lineage. This amounts to a cancellation of the implicit wedding contract in which the bride's family accepted cattle in exchange for her future offspring. Her death has brought the parents a major new economic liability along with the emotional loss of their daughter. If their daughter was married to a polygynist, their resentment finds a target at the funeral, namely, the other co-wives, who are typically blamed for causing her childlessness and her death (through witchcraft) and wanting to profit from her loss by taking her property for themselves. Since the deceased left no descendants, there is no one to protect her property from the co-wives after the funeral is over. Thus the dead woman's kin (in 1955–1957) came to such a funeral in a state of rage, attempting to destroy her furniture (if it was too heavy to carry away) so that the co-wives would not get it, and sometimes assaulting the co-wives as well. Nothing could express more poignantly the sense of total calamity experienced at the failure of a woman to become a mother before death.

THE EXPRESSION OF EMOTION AT FUNERALS

We have seen that many of the ritual actions of the Gusii funeral are explained by informants in emotional terms, as ways of preventing harm from affects attributed to the deceased (e.g., resentment

at having died untimely) and as reflecting an emotional reaction of the survivors to the corpse (fear of contamination). But as the pride in the fertility of an old grandparent and the anger at the death of a childless wife suggest, the Gusii funeral is an occasion not only for containing emotion but for expressing it. In fact, at no other Gusii ritual is such a wide range of affects expressed so openly and so intensely. Some affect displays at the funeral are mandatory, some (though not required) are permitted at funerals but on no other occasions, and some exceed the bounds of permissibility even for funerals. All funerary affect displays, including those regarded as excessive, are conventionalized in that they are socially expected and follow recognizable styles of expression. This does not imply that they lack personal meaning, but only that the meanings are conveyed through cultural forms comprehensible to other Gusii attending the funeral. Grief, anger, and fear are the affects most intensely expressed; others are described later.

1. *Grief.* The wailing of Gusii women is long and loud, with a culturally distinctive melodic and rhythmic style that is maintained even when they are sobbing and tears are running down their cheeks. This conventionalized wailing begins when someone is dying and continues on and off for several days, exhausting the close kinswomen of the deceased. There is no distinction between wailing of this sort and what we might think of as "spontaneous" crying. I was once with a woman when she learned that her four-year-old son had been killed by a car; she immediately began wailing in the standard Gusii style and kept going through the period of most intense grief. On other occasions, too, I observed the most bereaved women wailing this way without lapsing into a style we might consider more "natural." I have no reason to believe that conventionalized wailing is not a spontaneous outpouring of grief for Gusii women.

When a wife, mother, sister, or daughter of a dead person is wailing, anytime between death and the end of the public gathering, she usually does a slow shuffling dance in rhythm to the lament, arms thrust forward and palms turned upward. She sings an improvised lament sometimes addressed to the deceased, sometimes to the gathering. To an outsider, it appears to be a performance directed toward an audience, but it is not immediately clear who is the audience or how intentional the performance. In the first day after death, when closely related women pour ashes on themselves, their

laments are often addressed to the deceased. Mothers ask their dead sons, "How could you leave me?" and beg them to return; they remind the sons of special treats and favors given them in childhood, as if to say "Since I was so good to you then, how can you be so bad to me now?" (This theme of reciprocation for parental nurturance is a recurrent one in Gusii cultural narratives about parent-child relationships.) The dominant affect is sadness, but it is unmistakably mixed with the anger of scolding disappointment. In terms of theories of mourning, it is important to note that Gusii mourning can and at least sometimes does include the direct and public expression of anger to the deceased and the vivid reexperiencing of affectionate interactions.

Women more distantly related to the dead person do the same kind of wailing, singing laments and dancing, often with tears, sobbing and distraught facial expressions. Wailing becomes subdued during the grave-digging and filling-in (when it is theoretically proscribed). Once the grave-diggers have washed, there is a sudden explosion of grief as the women hurl themselves onto the grave wailing loudly, often rolling on the grave, clutching at the earth, sobbing and singing together. The noise and sadness of this scene is overwhelming, even to an observer who knows neither the deceased nor the mourners. After some time, the women begin dancing on the grave, singing laments; this can go on for hours at a large funeral. There can be no question that those women closest to the deceased exhaust themselves in public mourning.

The behavior of men could not be more different. In accordance with Gusii conventions, their expressions of grief are emotionally restrained and circumscribed in time. Men quietly direct the funeral ceremonies, prepare the corpse and dig the grave, read the Christian prayers, deliver formal eulogies at Seventh-Day Adventist funerals, and attentively observe the women express grief. Adult married men rarely weep or sob; the only occasion on which I witnessed it was at a 1974 funeral of a two-year-old boy where his father wept openly. The cattle drive and group intoning at the public gathering have been described above, and the cattle drive is no longer performed in the area of my research. Thus Gusii men are largely quiet participants in an occasion the emotional tone of which is defined by women. This does not mean that men are emotionally untouched by the grief of funerals; on the contrary, several men reported that the women's wailing made them feel mournful and

that it was important to them to pay attention to the women's expressions of grief. This helps account for the fact that men do not turn away when women are grieving but watch them carefully.

Gusii men claim they need prompting and external stimulation to overcome their inhibitions enough for even conventional displays of grief. They find this in the women's wailing, the collective encouragement of the group (of men) that stands together to intone, and (in 1974-1976) in the blaring transistor radios and record players. The loud rock music constitutes a din they experience as equivalent to the war cries of the cattle drive and as putting them in the mournful mood appropriate to a funeral. In reporting this, they merge the sadness concerning the loss of the deceased with the vengeful anger of the cattle drive—a merger which apparently reflects both personal experience and social expectation.

By the time of the burial and public gathering, the kinswomen closest to the deceased are often so exhausted that their public display of grief is somewhat subdued, and other women—recent arrivals—are more conspicuous mourners. The outpouring on the grave itself is often their last burst of energetic mourning, as they let others take over for them. The mourning that follows is varied not only by sex but by the individual mourner's relationship to the deceased. At two funerals of elderly women, the most conspicuous mourners, who were dancing on the grave long after others had stopped and weeping and wailing more grievously than any one else, were some young women *and men* who I discovered were the deceased's daughter's children. Having worked themselves into an almost frenzied grief, these young people showed by their prolonged and intense display how much their maternal grandmother had meant to them. This is particularly interesting because Gusii children are raised at their father's home and have only intermittent contact with their maternal grandmother who is known in Gusii lore as the primary joking partner for her grandson and the one who calls her daughter's children by their praise-names, that is, the names they are called only at their mother's home and which connote so much warmth and affection that informants report their use brings tears to their eyes. As in other patrilineal and patrilocal societies, so in Gusii the mother's kin, particularly her own mother, symbolize the unalloyed indulgence and emotional warmth that is superseded at (the father's) home by formal authority relations. The result seems to be that these grandchildren mourn with a greater intensity than others

at the funeral of an old woman, an intensity which, in the case of her male grandchildren, overcomes their masculine inhibitions about public weeping. Informants confirmed that observed behavior of maternal grandchildren at the two funerals was common and expected.

2. *Anger.* The expression of anger plays an important part at a Gusii funeral. The laments that women sing, before and after the burial, include accusations against alleged murderers and enemies of the deceased and criticism of how the deceased (especially if an elderly widow) had been neglected by her children. In other words, in singing a lament, a woman displays concern for and solidarity with the deceased *against* others, toward whom righteous anger and moral outrage are expressed. All of these accusations and criticisms would constitute extreme breaches of social convention if uttered on any occasion other than a funeral. Thus the funeral gives license to the public declaration of suspicion and hostile criticism that are normally withheld from all but the most confidential conversations.

At most funerals a mother, daughter, or wife of the deceased publicly claims that the death was caused by other persons, and this is expected. She may sing that the dead man had enemies who were jealous of his cattle or land and who killed him. Sometimes there is a conspiracy theme: When a young woman died in Kisii Hospital (in 1956) after I had taken her there for a cesarean section, her mother sang at the funeral that perhaps I had plotted her death with the hospital attendants (whom I had reported to the authorities for attempting to extract a bribe from the mother at the time of admission). Although I was upset at being accused, the assurances offered me that such funeral allegations were not to be taken seriously proved true; in fact, the woman who made them was never unfriendly to me thereafter. Men attributed this apparent inconsistency to the emotional volatility of women: When they are upset, they make irresponsible charges that are discounted then and forgotten soon afterwards. If a man were to say such things at a funeral, they could not be ignored or forgotten. While it is true that Gusii men are far more restrained in their public statements generally and their funeral expressions in particular, the truth behind female accusations that are not taken seriously is more complex.

The drama of accusation at a Gusii funeral has a public surface that may be consistent or inconsistent with the actual sentiments and beliefs of the local lineage elders who form public opinion and

make decisions about actions to be taken. In the public drama the deceased must be portrayed as a victim, killed by the willful intentions of others. Kinswomen close to the deceased make these allegations in histrionic laments because (I believe) they think the deceased is listening and would want to hear it that way. They are giving voice to what they construe as the dead person's reaction to his or her own death, that is, to blame it on enemies or on hitherto unknown conspirators. They do not feel free to blame the deceased for his or her own death, although (as shown below) the elders may believe he or she is responsible for it, or even to claim publicly that the death is attributable to neutral causes that make blame irrelevant—this would seem to them a betrayal of the dead person. The female accusers see their role as making a display of loyalty to the deceased, one that keeps the individual's public image blameless, attributes the death to the evil intent of others, and thereby assures the deceased that they are on his or her side. Having made this gesture at the time they believe the deceased's spirit is nearby—that is, before the house has been "cooled" by sacrifice—they feel protected against the harm that the spirit's resentment could bring. But they do not necessarily expect that their accusation, formulated for the benefit of the deceased, will be given credence by the others present or lead to action.

This interpretation makes sense of otherwise puzzling material, for example, accusations at the funerals of octogenarians that they were killed by their enemies, when most Gusii generally believe that people can die natural deaths in old age. If the purpose of the women making the accusations is to demonstrate their loyalty to the deceased by aligning themselves with what they believe to be the individual's own view of his or her demise, then the puzzle is removed. The accusations are offered not as a realistic explanation of death, but as comfort for the dead person's spirit and protection for the survivors. This also explains why a well-known Gusii proverb expresses skepticism about funerary witchcraft allegations, which are portrayed as universal but not always believable occurrences. In essence, the claim that a person was killed by the malevolence of others is a last tribute to the deceased, something that everyone is regarded as deserving regardless of the facts of the matter.

When the facts are believed to show that the deceased is responsible for his or her own death, they are not publicly mentioned at the funeral; here the discrepancy between the inevitable public accusa-

tions and the actual beliefs of the elders (and others) is unmistakable. In 1957, for example, a 50-year-old man was dying. The elders, who believed him to be suffering from the effects of antitheft medicine that had killed his son the year before, tried to persuade the man to admit his son's crime and permit counter-magical measures to be performed. He refused and died. At the funeral, none of this was mentioned, as his widows accused a neighbor with whom he had been having a boundary dispute of having killed him through witchcraft. In public, the deceased was represented as an innocent victim rather than someone whose own errors or culpability might have brought death upon him; the latter possibility was discussed only privately among the senior men of the neighborhood. Similarly, in 1976 a man said to be 100 years old fell asleep, drunk, and was fatally burned in the cooking fire. While we have no record of what was publicly said at his funeral, we know from informants that the violent and painful way he died was believed by funeral participants to be retribution by the spirits for several major abominations *(chimuma)* by the deceased, and that none of this was openly discussed at the burial or public gathering. Three days later the survivors were preparing to perform the ritual remedies for the deceased's wrongdoings, but the latter had been concealed at the funeral itself.

There are limits to the public representation of the deceased as a victim of wrongdoing by others. These were reached at the funeral in 1975 of a 69-year-old diabetic man who had been drinking heavily, against medical advice. The story circulated during the funeral that a rat from his grass roof had bitten him on the toe while he was asleep, that the wound had not healed, and he had died from it. People are rarely bitten by rats in Gusiiland, and since rats are associated with witches in Gusii belief, women sang at the funeral that a witch had sent a rat to kill him. In this case, however, the adult sons of the deceased, who feared that someone *within* the homestead would be accused, causing strife among the survivors (four co-wives and their children), intervened publicly to reject the witchcraft explanation and declare that he had died of diabetes. This shows that the witchcraft accusations at funerals are not always taken simply as gestures to placate the deceased that can be discounted in terms of their interpersonal consequences for the living. When adult men responsible for the welfare of the survivors decide

that funeral accusations will lead to division within the family, they will refute a divisive explanation in favor of one that is free of blame.

In other instances, however, the death gives rise to so much blame and division before the burial that there is no realistic possiblity of pragmatically suppressing or refuting the accusations of malevolence. In 1975, an eight-year-old girl died, allegedly the victim of poisoning by her paternal grandfather's wife (not the girl's grandmother, who was dead), who had been involved in serious disputes with the parents of the girl. The deceased was said to have told the story of her poisoning just before she died. Shortly afterward, the accused woman disappeared, an act interpreted as proving her guilt. For the burial of an immature girl, the funeral was heavily attended with perhaps 75 kin present, and the atmosphere was unusually tense. The grave was dug to a depth of 12 feet, indicating the prevalent opinion that the dead girl had been the victim of witchcraft and would be the target of cannibalistic attack after burial. One woman sang a lament accusing the grandfather of being an accomplice in the killing, since he permitted his wife to escape. No one argued with this claim. After the coffin was placed in the grave, the grandfather descended with a knife and opened the abdomen of the corpse to relieve the swelling and permit inspection by the elders, who stood at the head of the grave. Although the grandfather did this to prove his innocence and demonstrate his protective concern for the deceased, his act did not assuage the anger of the girl's mother, who shortly thereafter set fire to the house of the accused woman. The grandfather himself disappeared, rejoining his wife at this land in a settlement scheme in the Rift Valley. In this case, the public accusation at the funeral expressed anger that was consistent with actual community opinion and led to violent action and the dissolution of the homestead as an intergenerational domestic group.

The possibility of such cataclysmic outcomes from blame assigned at funerals is never completely out of mind, particularly for those men who assume responsibility for the care of survivors. Seventh-Day Adventists deal with this problem by preventive denial: At the funeral of a high-ranking civil servant described in an earlier section, leaders of the Adventist community explicitly stated in their speeches that the deceased had died of disease and no one should be blamed for his death. Their intent was that of the traditional Gusii

leader seeking to preserve unity and prevent division, but their style—attempting to suppress the opposing voices of the fractious women—contrasts sharply with the pluralistic expressive style of the Gusii funeral.

The description of anger as an affect expressed at funerals has carried us more deeply into the meaning of death for the Gusii. The accusations uttered by lamenting women leave no doubt that they view the deceased in the following terms: He (or she) believes himself to have been singled out for deprivation, is jealous of those not so deprived, wants to hear that his deprivation was an attack by others (primarily those he has previously suspected of wishing him ill), seeks retaliation against them, welcomes demonstrations of loyalty from allies in this retaliatory intent. This can be seen as selectively interpreting death in the idiom of segmentary opposition, a model of intergroup and interpersonal relations that is pervasive in Gusii social life and was a source of pride for men in precolonial patterns of feuding and warfare. When warriors retaliated against the attacks of other clans or lineages, they mobilized kin against the attackers, acting to protect the interests of the local agnatic group. In this context, retaliation was a form of moral action, associated with collective ideals. Thus when a man died, the warriors who came to pay their respects to him brought their cattle and weapons, enacting a drama of military retaliation as a means of identifying the deceased with this worthy cause regardless of the actual conditions of his death. Brandishing their spears against his invisible and unidentified killers, they publicly asserted his claim to the status of a group martyr whose death should be avenged. Awarding him this honor, they showed their loyalty in the way that mattered most in the segmentary Gusii context—by opposing his enemies.

The women's funeral accusations echo this traditional theme of martyrdom, assimilated to the more mundane (and nowadays more dangerous) realm of domestic and neighborhood relationships. Invoking actual persons and ongoing disputes, their attempts to portray the deceased as a victim of external attack involve the risk of exacerbating conflicts between persons and segments and must be dealt with by the men, who discount or contradict them as much as the situation permits. The women, taking advantage of their low status and low credibility, feel freer to sing openly what everyone suspects, leaving those in authority with the task of assessing the

validity of these claims and acting upon them. In funerals as in other Gusii rites, women play the role of the Shakespearean fool, expressing emotions that men disavow. But men and women are united in offering to the deceased the comfort of a martyr's death in the narrative drama of the funeral. Indeed, the Gusii funeral embodies a code for interpreting death in terms of opposition and vengeance.

3. *Fear.* Unlike grief and anger, which are publicly expressed at Gusii funerals, fear has no place in the ritual performance—it is assumed to be the motivation that lies behind it. In conventional belief, all of the prescribed burial practices, sacrifices, and other propitiatory measures of the funeral are explained as motivated by fear of the corpse's danger or the spirit's vengeful wrath, but their enactment normally proceeds without direct reference to that affect, as if it were precluded from experience by participation in the ritual. From this perspective, the standard funeral ritual consists of a series of precautionary responses to a potentially fearful situation.

Sometimes, however, the potential for fear arousal is realized at a funeral. In 1976, a mother of ten children died two years after her husband was killed in a motor accident; in the interim his brother, residing next door, had died. It was widely believed that the brother, jealous of the academic success of his nieces, had engaged in sorcery which killed the couple but also backfired on him. The rapid succession of deaths suggested to the survivors, as to others, that the sorcery medicines threatened to exterminate the entire homestead and perhaps that of the uncle as well. At her mother's funeral, the eldest daughter was distraught; she appeared grief-stricken in the extreme. Conversation with her indicated, however, that the intensity of her distress was due to fear that her brothers and sisters, if left at home, would be killed; within a week, she had moved them out of the homestead to kin living in distant places.

This case exemplifies a general principle, namely, that when a death is classified as affliction (sent by ancestors, witches, or sorcerers), it is seen as a sign that the homestead of the deceased will be annihilated and therefore arouses great fear as well as grief. During the funeral ritual, the distress of the mourners, particularly the survivors themselves, reflects their feelings of terror concerning the future embedded in conventional expressions of grief but understood to communicate their fear and sadness. In Gusii belief,

afflictions *(emechando)* threaten the lives not of a single individual but all who share his or her fate, particularly spouses and children. The common fate of homestead members, those who share a domestic community of production, reproduction, and distribution, is nowhere more starkly illustrated than in their belief that the death of one may mean the death of all. The fear that a person's death signifies group extinction lies behind much of contemporary Gusii reliance on ritual, not only in funerals but in divination, healing, and sacrifice outside the mortuary setting.

Affects other than grief, anger, and fear are in evidence at Gusii funerals, though they may not be as overtly or frequently expressed in word and action. The emotional moods of pride and shame at funerals of those who died after complete or incomplete reproductive careers, respectively, have been described above. Except at Seventh-Day Adventist funerals, with their eulogies explicitly based on American models, however, these feelings were expressed largely in the numbers of people attending, the collective mood they generated, and their private conversations about the deceased afterwards. For the participants, these implicit messages conveyed by the selective attendance and nonattendance of particular persons and their behavior at the public gathering, are unequivocal. In addition to pride and shame, there is the expression of love through grief, particularly by maternal grandchildren or adult sisters of the deceased, that is, persons who no longer reside in the homestead and are not part of the group whose mourning is most prescribed by convention. They come to the funeral from a distance and voluntarily convey their emotional attachment through intense and demonstrative grieving over the loss. The conventional structure of the Gusii funeral requires the expression of grief but permits other affects to be communicated in largely indirect ways that are nonetheless noticed and understood by the mourners themselves. Thus, each funeral, though following a cultural formula, is a unique event in terms of which emotions are expressed and by whom.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this article I have approached Gusii funerals as dramas communicating the terms in which life and death are collectively experienced in a Gusii community. Description of the dramas includ-

ed their prescribed physical setting, the standard script for ritual action, variations in script and performance according to individual life histories and circumstances of death, and the performance as a vehicle of emotional expression. In seeking meanings, I have used exegetical, operational, and positional evidence as conceptualized by Turner (1967:50–52), and I have also been guided by the advice of Huntington and Metcalf (1979:53–54) that "close attention to the symbolic attributes of the dead body provides an avenue into a culture's understanding of the nature of death."

Despite the Gusii funeral's abundance of elements suitable for analysis of symbols in the styles established by Durkheim, Freud, or Lévi-Strauss (representations of social groups and positions, phallic and vaginal images, binary oppositions and inversions, respectively), my focus has been on the characters of the drama, particularly the emotions and intentions attributed to them, as accounting for the central narrative action of the ritual. A ritual thus described and interpreted can be seen as embodying a narrative about self and others in interaction—one of numerous cultural narratives about the self that communities transmit and revise in accordance with their current sense of self. I found Gusii funerals, despite some structural changes in their script, to have retained their basic narrative content (i.e., the emotions and intentions attributed to the deceased and survivors in interaction) over a 20-year period, and I proceeded on the assumption that this content represented collectively shared concepts and expectations of the self and of relationships between the self and others.

The Gusii funeral takes place entirely at the home of the deceased, is conducted by closely related kin and is permeated in its narrative content by imagery derived from domestic architecture and domestic kinship, which retains many of the meanings it has in everyday life. In the funeral narrative, relationships with deceased persons are represented as though they were living kin, with emphasis given to attributes associated with their social positions and genealogical connections rather than those associated with their personal idiosyncrasies. Kopytoff (1971) has argued that a distinction between living elders and dead ancestors is not made in the indigenous verbal categories of many African (particularly Bantu) societies and is denied by the continuity of ritual attitudes toward elders, dead or alive. So it is with the Gusii, who refer to the spiritually

active dead elders as *chisokoro,* "grandfathers," a term referring to living kinsmen as well. Their funeral narrative, however, portrays the deceased of any age or status in continuity with expectations of him or her as a living member of the homestead, and the rituals are explained as prescribed ways of coping with the expectable response such a person would have at suffering a major misfortune. Thus the Gusii funeral narrative does not depict a distinctive world of spirits but is directly constructed from the expectancies of domestic relationships.

The interpretive summary that follows gives emphasis to those parts of the funeral narrative I believe to be particularly revealing of the sense of self in the Gusii community studied.

1. As soon as a person is defined as dying, his or her positional identity (as a man or woman of a particular stage of social maturity, identified with a particular house in a particular homestead and in certain kin relationships) becomes the salient focus of attention, determining location of dying, placement and treatment of the corpse, location of the grave and who digs it, who attends the funeral, and so forth. The drama of social identity, largely predictable from background facts about the deceased, constitutes the setting in which many more variable themes and feelings are expressed, but is also of great personal significance in itself. Contemporary Gusii feel strongly about dying at home in the proper place with a proper house and with grandsons to dig the grave; they go to great lengths and considerable expense to locate their deaths and funerals in the appropriate social space.

2. The representation of the deceased in the funeral narrative is split: corpse and spirit of the same decreased person have different properties. The corpse is dangerous to those associated with pregnancy and retaliatory processes, processes regarded as incomplete in Gusii belief, and it can kill them (thus terminating those processes) through contact with the earth in which it is buried. But the corpse's dangers act automatically (and only until the burial is over) rather than as the represented outcome of the deceased's intention or emotional response. Furthermore, the corpse is, itself, dangerously vulnerable, and ritual measures at the grave are directed to its protection from harm. The spirit, by contrast, is never portrayed as vulnerable, only dangerous to all the survivors in the homestead, and is represented as angry, resentful, and intending to kill them.

Its dangers are prolonged and must be dealt with through sacrifice over an extended period. The attribution of persistent emotion to the spirit is particularly evident in the ritual transition of a widow from the state of mourning to a leviratic union with her husband's brother or (patrilineal) cousin: they reveal a concern that someone (presumably the deceased) considers the new relationship to be adultery, despite the fact that it is a public obligation inherent in bridewealth marriage. Though eveyone knows the levirate to be customary and obligatory, the ritual deals with the *possibility* that it could be interpreted as adulterous, a possibility based (I believe) on the idea that the deceased remains a sexually jealous presence, unwilling to relinquish control over his wives' sexuality. The split between corpse and spirit as images of the deceased reveals two stories of vengefulness, in one case emanating from weakness and automatically threatening an immediate termination to ongoing activity; in the other, vengeance emanating from authority and deliberately threatening long-term destruction unless appropriate placation is offered.

3. Variations in treatment of the corpse and burial by age and reproductive maturity are particularly revealing of Gusii expectancies concerning the life goals of adult men and women. Every deceased is represented as deprived and vengeful, but those who had not achieved parenthood are given symbolic substitutes to compensate for what is believed to be their greatest deprivation. In response to the imagined disappointment of the dead person, he or she is awarded in burial a state of social maturity higher than that actually achieved: the unmarried woman is buried farther away (to symbolize her husband's home), the pregnant woman is buried with the fetus beside her like a child, the person without a house is built a hut to be buried by, etc. The mortuary ritual thus embodies an empathic response to the dead person's sense of frustration at not becoming a householder, spouse, or parent, based on the assumption that each person wants that progress along the Gusii stages of social maturity more than anything else. The only exceptions are those men whose visible public positions in the national society are viewed as compensating for their deficiencies in reproductive progress toward ancestorhood.

4. Although the emotional expressiveness of men and women at funerals is polarized in the extreme, the messages they intend to

communicate to the deceased are remarkably concordant. Men, in the customary cattle drive and show of weapons, gave a dead man a warrior's farewell by feigning an attack on his imagined (but unidentified) enemies; in precolonial days, this sometimes led to an attack on other Gusii clans. Women, in their contemporary accusations at funerals (to which the men pay close attention), strive for the same end, namely, to display loyalty to the deceased by publicly opposing his or her imagined enemies—even when the deceased is very old and not a plausible murder victim. Here again the survivors empathize with what they imagine to be the deceased's emotional reaction to his or her own death, namely, the sense that he or she was done in by enemies, and they attempt to placate the deceased's spirit at the public gathering by "feuding" on his or her behalf. Since this feuding is potentially dangerous, now more than ever, it has devolved upon women, whose accusations can be more easily contradicted or subsequently discounted, to engage in this form of public expression. The general posture of survivors toward the deceased, and the assumption on which it is based—namely, that the dead consider themselves murder victims and are comforted by displays of promised vengeance—remain salient among the Gusii.

This interpretative summary of narratives contained in Gusii funerals is offered as a series of hypotheses about the meanings Gusii assign to life, death, and the central relationships involved in both. These meanings are central to social processes in contemporary Gusii communities, and I am proposing that they are also central to the psychological well-being of contemporary Gusii individuals. They reveal the terms in which loss, separation, and deprivation are construed and the ideas chosen to compensate for the emotional disruption that begins at death. These hypotheses about the generality of the meanings in funeral narratives can be tested by examining other Gusii rituals that deal with different threats to psychological well-being and by examining how individuals use rituals in coping with stress—in material to be presented elsewhere.

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