DEATH IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

Authority, Innovation, and Mortuary Rites

EDITED BY
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Editors

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Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Introduction

Sébastien Penmellen Boret, Susan Orpett Long and Sergei Kan

Since its beginnings, the discipline of anthropology has encompassed the study of death, describing the centrality of its rituals in our lives, the richness of its material culture, and its multilayered functions and meanings in societies past and present. Looking at mortuary rites, anthropologists examine the ways a community deals with the departure of the deceased and the disposal of his or her remains, material and immaterial. To the Western reader this would usually imply a funeral, followed by burial or cremation. Yet anthropological research has shown tremendous variety in practices across the

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1

globe, including secondary burials, feasts, and commemoration of death anniversaries, from ancestor veneration in East Asia to the Jewish custom of *yahrzeit*. Anthropologists have come to conceptualize death rituals as rites of passage for the individual and the community, focusing on death not as an ending, but rather as an occasion for restoring social equilibrium and promoting sociocultural continuity (Hertz 1907; Van Gennep 1960). Viewing death as part and parcel of daily life in a community, more social and cultural anthropologists came to focus on the ways ideas and practices of death relate to complex sociocultural, economic, and technological domains within societies.

Building on these earlier insights, anthropological research on death beginning in the last years of the twentieth century has paid increased attention to the broad and dramatic changes experienced by much of the world due to colonialism and post-colonialism, and the increasing impact of global capitalism. In addition, large-scale migration and new communicative technologies have provided alternative ways to view the relation between the individual and society, and new economic structures have changed and expanded political power and social interaction. All of these potentially challenge customary ways of performing and thinking about funerals and memorialization. If it was ever true in the past that customs were relatively unquestioned, globalization and the Internet revolution have dramatically affected the scale and the speed at which contemporary global trends are recreated, used for new purposes, and applied practically. Alternative rituals and meanings drawn from elsewhere are selectively incorporated into local contexts and inspire new interpretations.

This volume goes a step further, contributing to "anthropology's toolbox" (Knauft 2006) for the study of death by asserting that funerary rituals and memorial rites not only reflect but also provide a conduit for cultural change, as the meaning and place of the individual in society are redefined in the context of new ideas, practices, and technologies. Its eight essays focus on a wide range of societies based on field work carried out in the early twenty-first century. The authors' rich descriptions from places with varying geographies, religions, and economies allow us to explore changes and question broadly the ways people face death, conduct ritual, and recreate the deceased in memory and in the material world. In all situations, agency to act in response to death and authority to make decisions about ritual and memorialization are challenged, reasserted, and negotiated in the context of changing ideas and technologies.

The Anthropology of Death and Sociocultural Change

Among the first anthropologists to focus on death as a significant cultural and biological event, Robert Hertz (1881–1915) held that mortuary rites served to reestablish the original state of a society that had been disrupted by the death of an individual. One of Durkheim's most promising pupils, Hertz authored one of the foundational texts in the study of mortuary rites, *A Contribution to the Study of Collective Representation of Death*, published in the French journal *L'Année Sociologique* in 1907. This study is based on the mortuary practices he observed among the Dayak of Borneo as well as examples from Melanesia, Polynesia, Australia, and Native North America. Hertz argued that death ritual functions in society to simultaneously transform the corpse, the soul, and the bereaved, while the entire community returned to a state of equilibrium.[1] This approach to death has inspired the development of the anthropology of death well into the twenty-first century (see Goody 1962; Bloch 1971; Danforth 1982; Metcalf 1982; Kan 1989, 2015; Suzuki 2000; Conklin 2001).

Along with changes in anthropology more broadly, death studies in the field moved away from functionalism to emphasize ritual and symbolic dimensions of mortuary ritual (notably, Huntington and Metcalf 1991 and Bloch and Parry 1982). In these volumes, the social, cultural, and technological elements of death rituals are intertwined. Bloch and Parry distinctively examine the frequent "relationship between mortuary beliefs and practices and the legitimation of the social order and its authority structure," where individuals maintain their position of authority as well as the eternal order by "transforming the dead into a transcendent and eternal force," thus denying the arbitrariness and finality of individual death (Bloch and Parry 1982: 41). Other works have also recognized the significance of processes of exchange in mortuary rites, including Damon's edited volume on *Death Rituals and Life in the Society of the Kula Rings* (1989) and Barraud's (1994) *Of Relations and the Dead*. These essentially focused on the traditional authority of societies that are "based on unchanging eternal order grounded in nature or in divinity" (Palgi and Abramovich 1984: 391–392). Kan (1989, 2015) demonstrated in his study of the mortuary and memorial rites of the nineteenth-century Tlingit Indians of Alaska that this "unchanging eternal order" was grounded for the Tlingit in the ideal of an eternal existence of matrilineal kinship groups, which perpetually recycled their collectively owned personal names/titles and other tangible and intangible sacred possessions.

The rapidity of change widely experienced in societies throughout the world challenge past assumptions of a stable social order. These disruptions and transitions are being explored in newer approaches to the anthropology of death. Essays on mortuary rites in modern-day Africa in a volume edited by Jindra and Noret argue that funerals represent "occasions for the (re)production and the (un)making of both solidarities and hierarchies, both alliances and conflicts" as well as Durkheimian "moments of social communion in the face of death" (2011: 2). Earlier approaches to death rituals cannot offer a completely satisfactory picture of mortuary practices in societies "where authority and legitimacy are multiple" (2011: 4). Our volume continues that critique.

Although changes are experienced in local contexts, colonialism, post-colonialism, secularization, and globalization have resulted in changes that can be broadly identified across many societies, including transformations within their realms of death. For instance, the uniqueness of the Mexican version of All Soul's Day, such as its *carnivalesque* and macabre performances and its sweets in the shape of skulls and skeletons, is often thought to have originated in indigenous customs. However, recent research suggests that the Mexican "Day of the Dead" could also be "a colonial invention" resulting from demographic (epidemics and massacres), economic (sugar trade), and acculturation (Christianization) processes initiated by Spanish conquerors (Brandes 1997: 293). A similar relationship between mass death and mortuary rites can be found in African societies suffering from epidemics of HIV/AIDS since the 2000s. Scholars have suggested that the exponential increase of mortality there has contributed to rapid changes in the way people deal with death. In Kenya, the social stigma attached to victims of HIV/AIDS challenges the Christian belief in life after death, and seems to shift funerals from the public to the private domain, while in South Africa infected individuals are seen as "dead before dying" (Nzioka 2002; Niehaus 2007; see also Kilonzo and Hogan 1999).

Global changes affecting ideas and practices of death include increased ideological and physical control by the state over local ritual practices, the spread of so-called "world religions" and the simultaneous rise of fundamentalism and secularism. For example, scholars of colonial Africa have discussed the broad influence of missionaries and the colonial governments on the ways people negotiated their indigenous funerals and burials for the self-proclaimed "civilized" and "sanitized" mortuary rites. During the post-colonial era, struggles over the performance of death rites not only served debates over national identities and statehood, but also led

to the transformation of death practices by, for example, fusing Christian and pre-colonial imagery (Lee and Vaughan 2008: 345–355). New practices may challenge or accommodate previously existing beliefs about death, the afterlife, and what constitutes proper funerary and memorial ritual. Thus, as Merz describes in this volume, people in northwestern Benin perceive different options for burying the dead according to the "new ways" or the ancestral ways. New ways of burial become feasible as people reinterpret existing beliefs about how an individual's animating force, identity, and body interrelate before and after death. Also in this volume, Mathews and Kwong trace the correlation between beliefs about the afterlife and the way people live in affluent societies in which religious and secular ideologies coexist and intertwine. Many Japanese people Boret (Chapter 8) met who seek out ecological burial interpret traditional symbols of the regeneration and continuity of the immaterial life-force by envisioning their ashes as fertilizing the vegetation that marks and surrounds their burial places.

Colonialism and post-colonialism have also led to the experience of migration, raising questions about dying and death far from the home community. The violence and injury accompanying migration for economic and political reasons may lead to migrants' deaths where there are no appropriate kin and community members with the cultural expertise to perform customary death rites. To counter the uncertainties and meet the needs of migrants, traditions might be reinterpreted, once banned practices tolerated, and new practices accepted. The many examples include the taking of photographs of the washing and burial of the dead among the Muslim diaspora in Berlin, which, originally considered *haram* (forbidden), serve now both as proofs that the "proper" mortuary practices have been followed, and as mediums between the migrants and those living in the motherland (Jonker 1996). Chilean migrants in Sweden created a new ritual to compensate for the absence of burial, a "funeral in exile" (Reimers 1999). Migrants may contribute to the transformation of mortuary rites at home, like those of Ghana whose remittances to their family transformed funerals into lavish events (Mazzucato et al. 2006). As Seebach documents in this volume, even in the case of the death of those who do not leave, the immigrants' absence from funerals and memorial occasions is felt by those remaining at home, and alternatives sought to their timely presence. Another discussion of the colonial experience is Wanner's chapter on the incorporation of western Ukraine into the Soviet Union, with implications for ritual practice and the relationships with people newly considered to be among the ancestors.

Perhaps the most evident change of our time is the introduction and adaptation of new technologies. These may have a direct relation to death rituals, such as the nineteenth-century development of arterial embalming technology in the United States, leading to the possibility of delaying funerals or holding elaborate wakes. Modern arterial embalming has subsequently become more common elsewhere, such as France (Puymérail et al. 2005). In contemporary Africa, societies experiencing urbanization, migration, and war have also turned to refrigeration, embalming, and digital mourning, sometimes alongside traditional ideas and practices (Lee and Vaughan 2008: 343). Scholars have considered the ways in which new technologies complicate boundaries between life and death, and how they affect definitions of personhood (Lock 2002; Franklin and Lock 2003; Sharp 2007). The advancement of technology facilitates the ideology of death as an individual journey in which choices are made along the way. At the center of this notion are the anthropological distinction between biological and social death, questions of the relative authority of medical personnel and technology in these processes, and the idea of death becoming a "choice" (Lock 2003: 189) by individually drawing from a range of cultural scripts about dying (Long 2005). In some cases, the technology comes into being in totally unrelated contexts but is adapted for uses related to death. Kneese's chapter in this volume brings into focus care/memorial blogs for the dying on the Internet, but even the cameras of mobile phones can have an impact on people's ability to be part of ritual from a distance and on the interpretation of the nature of the death and ritual, as Seebach found in Acholi society.

Agency, Authority, and Memory in Changing Mortuary Practices

This volume argues that especially in changing sociocultural landscapes, the multiple agencies of the deceased, the survivors, and others recognized as legitimate cultural actors means that the authority to make decisions about and to interpret death practices is subject to negotiation, contestation, and resistance. Since the 1980s anthropological theory has ceased to focus *solely* on "anonymous and supra-individual entities," or structures. Bourdieu, among others, began to pay more attention to the central role of the actions and approaches adopted by individuals in

response to the *wider* social structures in which they live (Bourdieu 1977; see also Ortner 1984; Giddens 1984). However, anthropology also denies that individual agency can be independent of structure. Rather it insists that agency depends on culture for its form and actualization, and is internalized through action (Butler 1990) and the various disciplinary techniques of the social structure (Foucault 1995). At the same time, agency is not deterministic, so although human behavior, including rituals, generally reinforces the social structure, it can also produce and affirm alternatives to it. Understanding mortuary practices thus requires careful consideration of the workings of agency, authority, and the creation of memory in both the larger society and in the intimate spaces, which accommodate the underlying processes leading to the transformations and innovations of contemporary mortuary rituals.

Agency

With regard to death, the understanding of agency varies in different ethnographic contexts, consistent with local understandings of the human, natural, and supernatural worlds. Frequently, agency extends beyond humans, located in animals, in ritual items, in the state, and certainly in the deceased and his/her spirit, ghost, or soul. The need to exert human or godly control over other agents motivates much mortuary practice. In her chapter on death in Apiao, Bacchiddu relates that in this isolated community, which has experienced less directly and intensively the global forces outlined above, balancing the power of various agents involved in the death can be a significant post-mortem responsibility. Under conditions of more rapid social change, these understandings may be questioned, rejected, or altered. Some of our chapters shed light on the novel agency of actors who might have historically been absent from the process of decision-making. For instance, the chapters in Part III investigate the agency of the dead-to-be over his/her own funeral ceremony, referring to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's notion of "Death of One's Own, Life of One's Own" whereby choice over death rites is no longer a case of free will but an obligation imposed upon the individual to choose his/her own ways of death (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; see also Walter 1994; who draws on Giddens 1991). Likewise, people may attempt to control the way that they will be remembered after their death, such as designing and contracting for their own grave. Social, economic, and geographic mobility and the introduction of new ideologies lead to the

redefinition of what or who constitutes an agent. We are particularly struck by the ways that changes in agency may lead to ritual innovation, resulting in changes in the way death rites are conducted and interpreted. Transformations of death practices reflect both external, structural influence and local agency.

Authority

Of course potential agents may not all have the same ability to influence the consequences of the death. Decisions about ritual, life going forward, and the creation of the memory of the death and the deceased take place in contexts of unequal influence and power. In our book, we thus also draw upon the idea of authority and ask questions of which actors have cultural legitimacy, whose views matter more, and how broader changes in society can challenge those assumptions and customary practices. For example, several scholars have pointed to the historical increase in the intervention of the state in practices surrounding death (see Verdery 2000; Farrell 1980; Bernstein 2006). The varying relationship among religions, the state, and community and personal responses to death suggest that authority and control over mortuary rites and memory is differently located in different societies as well.

Historically, mortuary rituals, disposal of the body, and the memorialization of the dead were often matters of family and community concern but practices were grounded in worldviews that included assumptions about powerful supernatural agencies. Thus to the extent that a community had specialists to deal with supernatural matters, these ritual or religious leaders were seen as having authority, along with the family, elders, and so on over when and how things were done. With the growth of codified formal religious traditions, the authority of clerics was even stronger and religious institutions were considered responsible for creating the broad cosmological canvas underlying funerals and burial practices.

The development of a scientific understanding of the world, which viewed life and death as part of nature, began to challenge seriously the near-monopoly held by religious leaders on the subject of death. The surge of scientific thinking was strengthened by the Industrial Revolution, and in particular mass production of funerary goods, the advent of modern embalming, urbanization, and the dispersal of kinship networks (Mitford 1998; Ariès 1974; Kawano 2010; Suzuki 2000, 2013). This has resulted in highly industrialized, affluent settings in a sharing and to some degree, a

transfer of authority to private industry and to "experts" in funerary ritual and bodily disposal. As societies encounter some degree of "western" science, industrialization, and capitalism, elements of these newer practices may be presented, adopted, and adapted by local authorities and agents to suit their beliefs and practices, as some of the chapters in this volume attest. The politicization and secularization of mortuary practices is a significant trend in some of the ethnographic scenarios described in this volume, but agency and authority also play out in the more private spaces of people's lives. Claims to authority may include not only active resistance to the status quo, but also interpersonal struggles within a family or community that go unnoticed in the larger public sphere. Investigating negotiations in the intimate domain, our volume identifies the interrelationship between authority and agency in the lived space where structure and agency intersect. Despite contemporary ideologies of individual autonomy, negotiations and tensions among those involved in a death continue even in societies that encourage living wills and pre-arranged funerals. Thus, we argue, agency and authority have become the *sine qua non* of the contemporary studies of death-related practices.

Memory

It is also necessary to think about the ways that people claim legitimacy to define the life of the deceased and its significance. Memorialization refers to the processes creating social or collective memory through tangible (monuments, memorial sites) and intangible (ceremonies, narratives, etc.) acts of remembrance. Acts of *public* memorialization are often associated with the broader politics of national, ethnic, racial, and religious identities and the making of colonial histories (Halbwachs 1975; Connerton 1989; Nora 1989; Verdery 2000; Haas 1998). More recently, anthropologists have studied the making of memory in more intimate and personal domains such as that of kinship. Carsten (2007), for example, demonstrates how personal and collective memories are mutually entrenched in the understanding of relationships. In his study of death in the contemporary United States, Green (2008: 160) suggests that memory has replaced the religious emphasis on the afterlife in mortuary ritual, "committing the dead to living memory rather than a locale beyond the natural world" (p. 160). He goes on to talk about an American "cult of memory" that he finds to be a "distinctly postmodern idiom" in societies in which no other type of immortality seems possible. Yet the importance of

memory is highlighted in a variety of societies examined by the authors of this volume, and taken together, this work informs us of the common relationship between mortuary rites and the (re)production of memory within the intimate spheres of everyday life and interpersonal relationships.

Of particular interest to us is the understanding that memorialization is not a single event or a series of practices and rituals. Rather, it is an ongoing process that builds on, yet continually alters, past perceptions. Some of the authors of this volume consider questions of agency and authority in the social process of *personal* memory construction through mortuary rites, reminding us that "neither the production of the self nor the memory is pre-scripted or foreclosed" (Castern 2007: 26), but always in the making. Memorial ceremonies "celebrating" the life of an individual, that is, funerals, the modes of disposing of the deceased's body, the handling of material belongings associated with the departed, a blog, and other digital memorial remains dedicated to the beloved lost through illness (discussed in Kneese's chapter) all contribute to the continued existence of the personhood of the dead, or as Long and Buehring in this volume choose to name it, the "post-death self." Memorialization thus contributes to the agency of the deceased in the private, and sometimes the public, realm, and thus to the transformation of death practices in the twenty-first century.

The significance of memorialization as an approach to dealing with death in some contemporary societies forms the basis for some of the most novel modes of disposal that have arisen, including "green" or tree burials discussed by Boret or the recent technological use of QR codes or steel-cased computer chips embedded in tombstones that enable visitors to learn about the deceased's life, sometimes through his or her own pre-recorded voice (Riechers 2013). By adopting such practices, the "dead-to-be," that is, the living who are facing or planning for their deaths, not only express agency but also acquire cultural authority over the representation of their own death. Through this practice, they attempt to ensure that their memories and their remains will be dealt with according to their own ideas of death and the memory and/or legacy they wish to leave behind. Yet our volume also demonstrates that these efforts remain dependent on the actions of surviving individuals and institutions. The detailed ethnographic accounts of each chapter take us to the heart of the interpersonal processes of decision-making, conflicts, and negotiations that surround death practices. Rather than assume that established structures (including classifications based on ethnicity, religion, social class, and

economic status) elicit particular ideas and behavior, the authors of our chapters reveal the ways that the participation of culturally recognized agents and the negotiation of authority enable people to bypass, adapt, or give new meanings to rituals and ideas of death. Thus death is not always a conservative rite of passage that reinforces the structure and values of the society (Davies 2005). Our chapters show that death rites involve dynamic processes of decision-making, leading to productions and reproductions of innovative, syncretic, or enduring meanings and practices of death. These upcoming mortuary rites might constitute a form of resistance to powerful institutions (religion, state, or otherwise) or/and changes in established ideas of death. Whether public or private, in their relatively constant state of "becoming," death practices may reinforce values and practices long present in a society, but in some situations, what looks "traditional" may be utilized for new purposes, and what looks new may be strategically employed to fortify older ways of life.

Agency, Authority, and the Uses of Tradition

In Part I of this volume, authors explore rites and ideas about death in relation to cultural and religious practices understood as "tradition." These ethnographies come from societies quite different from each other in their level of affluence and degree of commitment to a religious heritage. Bacchiddu works on an island off the coast of Chile, a society relatively isolated from state power and global economics, espousing egalitarian values, and whose dead are feared as having the capacity to sanction inappropriate behavior among the living. If they are cared for properly, the ancestors are benevolent. They are thus seen as retaining agency after death. In death rites, people must negotiate both with the spirits of the dead and with their neighbors and friends in a system of exchanges meant to assure the safety of the survivors and the continuity of their way of life. Bacchiddu does not assume that people blindly follow traditional rites, but rather observes them putting forth great effort to control the intervention of the deceased's spirit by engaging their own agency through their social relationships with the living.

There is also concern about the agency of the "unquiet dead" in rural western Ukraine where Wanner has studied mortuary practices as lived religion in the aftermath of the Second World War and during conditions of state-orchestrated hostility to religious institutions. During that time, local death rituals attempted to ensure the salvation of the soul as the last

act of reciprocal exchange between generations. This was especially important in the context of state-sponsored violence and wartime destruction, which was the source of many "bad deaths," for which the deceased might extract revenge on the living. Proper attention to ritual prescription ensured that the dead would not harm their living kin, remain peaceful, and even serve a protective function over successive generations. In this way, death rituals also served to link the generations to each other and articulate a definition as to who counts as an ancestor and what the obligations of the living are to the dead. However, efforts to deal with the active agency of the dead were complicated by the authority of the Soviet state, which outlawed certain churches and arrested overly visible practitioners. In such a context, mortuary practices rooted in the local "lived religion," in which the dead are active agents, had to be partially improvisational, creative, domesticated, and gendered within the interstices of the authority of the Soviet state over death.

Both Bacchiddu and Wanner describe rural societies where strong ambivalence marks the prevailing attitude of the living toward their dead kin. On the one hand, the dead must be placated and remembered by means of elaborate funeral and memorial rites and periodic prayers and offerings. On the other hand, the living are eager to forget them by avoiding contact with dead bodies, cemeteries, and so forth. Thus by "paying their debts" to the dead, the living keep them at bay, though larger structural forces may impact their ability to do so.

In contrast to both western Ukraine and Apiao, Mathews and Kwong provide a comparative perspective on ideas about death based on ethnographic interviews in three economically affluent societies, the United States, Japan, and China. They argue that religious belief influences not only what people think happens after death, but how a sense of post-death existence, or the denial of it, helps shape their lives in the present. The cultural sources of specific ideas about the afterlife vary across the three countries, including the impact of the Chinese communist government's crackdown on most religion and ancestral ceremonies in a way that parallels the Soviet atheist campaign described by Wanner. The teachings of organized religion are only some of the sources from which individuals draw in constructing their personal ideas about death and about morality, with some rejecting any notion of a supernatural world or life after death.

This is perhaps the greatest marker of how different these societies are (especially China and Japan) from the others discussed in this part of the book. Mathews and Kwong note that a large portion of the population is

not concerned with questions of God or the existence of a world after death. These people are committed to maintaining a moral code for how to live and die as a good person but do not see religion as the only possible source of the moral code to make these judgments. In these societies, individuals are seen as agents in defining their own identities through their beliefs and practices. Selectively chosen religious ideas about death are thus utilized not to maintain continuity with past lifeways, but to further postmodern expectations to express agency and to create one's social identity.

Authority is thus located differently in each of the societies discussed in this part. In Apiao, authority is found in "tradition," and the proper ways to deal with death require individuals to accommodate beliefs in the agency of the dead. The authority for family and neighbors to decide and to act is expressed in their moral behavior and successful negotiations with these agents. In contrast, those in the western Ukraine had to exercise their limited agency within the interstices of the power and authority of the Soviet state and the Russian Orthodox Church, producing new meanings of "traditional" rites and ritual items. In the postindustrial societies of China, Japan, and the United States, rather, the ideology of individual autonomy locates not only agency but also authority. These chapters point to ways "traditional" ideas and practices of death may allow individuals and local communities to craft their own responses to their own mortality and that of others.

Personhood, Memory, and Technology

Part II of this volume asks us to consider not only the ideas but also the material elements of mortuary rituals. The three chapters in this part continue an exploration of disparate cultural settings: the United States, Bebelibe of northwestern Benin, and Acholi in Northern Uganda. They explore the relationship between death and particular technologies: coffins for burial, photographs of the dead, and the digital technologies behind blogs and social networking sites that produce "digital remains." These chapters ask how mortuary technologies relate to notions of personhood, the production of memory, and the authority to define these.

Merz picks up on questions of tradition introduced in Part I, explaining that the "new times" for the Bebelibe are associated with Christianity *and* with material change. Coffin burials are new or "modern," requiring a rectangular grave in contrast to the round burial chambers that

customarily marked "good deaths." Introduced to the region by government and professional workers and other educated groups, who in turn are seen as "modern," many now find it desirable to bury inside coffins despite the cost and what would appear to be a conflict of different understandings of personal identity, death, and reincarnation. For others, however, the customary round grave continues to be important because its construction allows the animating force and identity of the deceased to leave the grave once the body has decomposed in order to be united with a new body. In contrast, it is believed that the closed coffins trap the animating force and identity and impede reincarnation. A Christian understanding of what happens at death, the immediate departure of the animating force and identity (which, in turn, are referred to as the soul/spirit when speaking French) from the body, provides an alternative explanation that eliminates the necessity of the round burial chamber, but one that does not challenge the fundamental belief in reincarnation. Merz argues that new technologies and new interpretations can exist as what she calls embellishments of ideas and rituals rather than as threats to them, allowing for new understandings to develop over time that result in different Bebelibe versions of "new times" and of Christianity.

Merz's concept of "embellishment" is an important one, as it suggests that members of a society undergoing material, social, and ideological change find it easier to accept the transformations in mortuary practices if they see them as elaborations on existing ones rather than radical departures that challenge the authority of "tradition." Conversely, cognizant of a more contemporary anthropological view of culture as a set of loosely shared orientations for communication and mutual understanding rather than a coherent system of symbols and meanings, Merz finds that different members of Bebelibe society, as in all societies, may hold different views on what constitutes proper mortuary rites, and that even a single person may hold contradictory ideas on this subject. Agency and authority thus become more widely distributed with these embellishments while maintaining a facade of "tradition."

New technology allowing photographing the dead and the funeral rites with cameras and cell phones is also a way of maintaining close ties with the past. In Acholi, where the violence of the 1970s–2000s has created tremendous social disruption, Seebach finds three reasons for taking death photographs. One of these reasons is to keep the deceased's personhood alive for the children who may not know or remember the dead and for the mourners to keep something of the person nearby despite his or her

corporeal absence. The photos allow these children some degree of agency to remember the deceased and the funeral despite their youth or absence. The elders use these photographs to create a collective memory, one that reinforces their authority and the authority of the "Acholi way," that is, the "correct" way. At the same time, the photographs themselves have social lives, a sort of agency derived from the deceased and the authority of those who control the images to impact the social lives of those who interact with these images.

Exploring the maintenance of blogs and social networking of the terminally ill and their digital remains after death, Kneese argues that although we often imagine the virtual world as immaterial, disembodied, and autonomous, in reality, it depends on the material world of technology, money, and labor. These virtual sites of memorialization result from the authority of the company, which enables the communication among the various agents: the dying person, family members and friends, and unrelated visitors. The algorithms of digital platforms structure interactions, sometimes sending unsolicited reminders to follow the deceased on Twitter. Go Daddy, a large private Internet domain registrar, demands payment to maintain the domain name of a blog. Although assisting with posts to the dying person's blog or social networking site, or maintaining them after the person's death may be a source of support and an expression of love, these are forms of affective labor nonetheless, done as Kneese notes, along with changing colostomy bags and planning memorial rites. However, the contributions of many, including those who are initially strangers, democratically assist in the creation of the person's digital memory and provide a new twenty-first-century medium for communicating with the dead. They also create new arenas for contestations about control over the deceased's "digital remains," based on new structures of authority enabled by the new technology.

All three chapters in Part II shed light on the way memory, memorialization, and personhood are defined, mediated, and continued after death. As Kneese points out, anthropologists and sociologists have long recognized that personhood is "networked," in the sense that interactions with others are needed to define, create, establish, and reinforce a social self. That process continues beyond death as others, with varying degrees of knowledge and authority, contribute to the collective memory of the person, the way in which the deceased continues to exist among the living. In Bebelibe society, the individual is composed of three elements: the physical form, the animating force, and the identity.

The animating force and identity elements, that is, what makes the person alive and unique, are linked together and so jointly reincarnate into a union with a new body. It is the job of the survivors to make sure, through ritual and the construction of an adequate grave, that such a new union can happen, thus contributing to the person's continued existence. In contrast to pre-Christian thought where separation only occurs after the body has decomposed, the "new times" and Christianity have introduced the notion that the animating force and identity are a person's soul and spirit, which leave the body immediately at death. This results in decreased concern about the type of grave or the timely performance of ritual, creating greater focus on the festive aspects of family reunion during *dihuude* celebrations that follow well after death and burial.

In Acholi, people articulate that the photographs are taken to maintain the personhood of the deceased, to allow those too young to remember to know their close relative, and to allow those who cannot attend the funeral to experience the person at his or her death. The photographs provide a concrete object of remembrance and a material connection with the deceased. As Seebach points out, in a region ravaged by violence, where many of the dead have no marked burial places, their photographs serve as surrogate or proxy graves. They are the only material objects the survivors can keep, not only to remember their loved ones, but also to cope with their grief. Furthermore, the elders are aware that these objects have the power to help them construct a collective memory by documenting for the younger generations how things have been done the "Acholi way" or how things *should* be done despite years of social change, war, and destruction of communities. Whoever controls the photographs in a sense controls the memory of the person, of the family story, and of a former way of life. Kan (2015: 293–319) provides an example of the way that photography has come to challenge the authority of the clan leaders' and elders' control of death rituals. He reports that picture-taking of Tlingit memorial potlatches has become so invasive and distracting that chiefs and elders now tell participants to refrain from video recording and photographing during what should be the most solemn and emotional portion of the ritual.

The technology differs, but there are parallels in Americans' use of digitized data. Although among a wider network than kin, friends, and neighbors, the personhood of someone who has died is discussed and remembered, creating a post-death person. But how that story is told, recorded, and saved for future readers is as complex as the webs of social

relationships and the technologies of American society more generally. There is tension between democratic participation in creating a collective memory, the companies that house the digital posts, and the family of the deceased. Moreover, in the less personal and partially anonymous virtual world of the postindustrial North, there is always a possibility that voyeuristic strangers, "death tourists," or people falsely claiming a close relationship to the deceased will participate in this process. Despite the wide dispersal of authority in North America to define and remember the dead, those with no ties to the deceased do not share in that cultural legitimacy.

We need to remember when thinking about the material underpinnings of personhood and memory that the use of various technologies comes with real monetary costs. In a powerful critique of the American funeral industry, Mitford (1998) accused funeral directors and others involved in pushing high-cost funeral items such as fancy caskets on vulnerable, grieving families. However, anthropologists working in numerous settings have noted that vast resources for funerals are commonly expended as survivors' attempts to show respect for the dead and to make a claim for the family's moral legitimacy or/and social status (see Huntington and Metcalf 1991; Robben 2004; and Bacchiddu and Seebach in this volume). Likewise, the chapters in this part all note that expenses of defining and maintaining a person's memory (or in some cases a memory of an entire way of life represented by that person's funeral) may involve new costs as well as new technologies to mark desired social status through purchasing symbolic goods, hiring professional photographers, buying a casket, or maintaining a digital archive. The financial cost of doing so may be significant for family members, so that they take on debt or postpone other expensive rituals to express the moral legitimacy of their decisions to perform particular rites or remember in particular ways.

INDIVIDUAL, CHOICE, AND IDENTITY

Part III of the book takes up the topics of agency and authority (raised by Kneese) in decisions about mortuary practices in affluent postindustrial societies. In particular, they ask who makes decisions about whether the funeral and burial practices should be the standard ones of the past or newer alternatives that can be more personal and individualized. Recent theorists have suggested that in modern times agency is no longer a choice but, like individualization, an obligation. In their essay "Death of One's Own,

Life of One's," German sociologists Beck and Beck-Gernsheim explain that contemporary "people are forced to conceive of themselves as do-it-yourself producers of meaning and biography, to play a part in shaping both their own lives and the life of society" (2001: 151). Included in this requirement is the continuity of the production of that meaning and biography through their own death. It will therefore come to no surprise that, as Lash puts it in his foreword to Beck, "individualization is a fate, not a choice; in the land of individual freedom of choice, the option to escape individualization and to refuse participation in the individualizing game is empathetically not on the agenda" (Lash 2001: xvi).

The chapters in this part find that in much of contemporary Japan and the United States, what outlives the person is not a restless spirit or merely material objects such as pictures. What seems most significant to many people in these societies, what remains most important, is his or her memory. This memory is not merely an *ad hoc* collection of individually recollected anecdotes, but constitutes a representation of his or her social identity based on the way the person lived, on the type of ritual and disposal of remains he or she voiced as desirable, and on the selective interpretations and stories that are exchanged among the living.

Boret explores these questions through his research on a type of burial relatively new to Japan called "tree burial." Rather than having the deceased's ashes added to those of the ancestors in a family tomb, some people choose to have a tree as their own grave marker. Anthropologists have pointed to the shaping of such alternatives by demographic realities, such as not having an heir to take on the responsibilities of maintaining a family grave (Rowe 2003; Kawano 2010; Boret 2014; Danely 2014). In this chapter, Boret shows that this decision also reflects the identities and relationships of the individuals who make such a choice while alive in order to create a legacy for the survivors and a memory that will reflect who they were. The problem here may be that the authority and agency of family members to perform the customary rituals do not align. Rather than considering this as an example of the individualization of mortuary ritual, it should be seen as a way of negotiating how one will be remembered, perhaps as a happily married couple of a nuclear family or as a woman in an unhappy marriage who rebels against burial in her husband's family's grave. He also suggests that tree burial is a means of (re)gaining control over the representation of one's death, which has been controlled and standardized by the funeral industry. But this (re)appropriation is not without some limits. The individual has agency to make choices about

what should be done with his or her body. Nonetheless, that agency is constrained by requirements that she or he do so, the expectations of new social ideologies to accept or renounce "traditional" burial practices, and to create a personal identity by which to be remembered. Not to choose is to risk not being considered a full social being (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). To choose, this part of the book argues, is to contribute to change in the broader understanding of death in Japan.

Long and Buehring ask how that process of decision-making might occur. What constitutes a "traditional American funeral" has changed over time; options for mortuary ritual have expanded through a history of immigration, industrialization, and ideological change. Exploring the perceptions and experiences of American couples who come from different religious backgrounds sheds light on the processes of interpersonal negotiation and the attribution of meaning to various mortuary options. They find that individual religious (or secular) identity, together with marital negotiations over the course of the couple's relationship, influences, but does not determine, how things will be done when a person dies. The key value voiced was that of respect, respect for the dead and respect for the individual, which is an acknowledgment of the authority of the individual to make decisions. The deceased's memory, or "post-death self" (Long and Buehring 2014) to the extent that it remains a presence in society, may reflect the agency of the person to set the tone while alive, but is dependent on others who have the authority to actualize, correct, and embellish, regardless of whether the funeral and burial are "traditional" or "alternative." The authority of the living participants is based on the moral claim of respect for the deceased, even when making choices that the individual may not have voiced. They moreover suggest that in what we, following Victor Turner, might call the liminoid experience of ritual, in the communal taking apart of the pieces of mortuary ritual and creatively putting them back together, these intermarried families provide alternative models of practice that contribute to the Levi-Straussian bricolage contemporary U.S. mortuary practice.

Looking Ahead at the Anthropological Study of Death

The chapters in this book provide not only rich ethnographic case studies, but also bring our attention to significant questions of agency and authority embedded in the production of mortuary rites and the sociocultural process of memorialization. They collectively contribute to a more

sophisticated understanding of the relationship between experiences of continuity and change within local ideas and practices of death. How do new concepts and technologies impact understandings of agency, and who has the moral, political, and economic authority to perform and interpret mortuary rituals? Ideas about the agency of the deceased are responsive to social change. In the rural societies discussed by Bacchiddu and Wanner, the dead ancestors unmistakably have agency since they are believed to be capable of harming their living kin if the latter neglect them (see Straight 2006). Alternative beliefs and practices that emphasize the continuity of identity through memory rather than the physical body are garnering increased interest in Northern Europe, the United Kingdom, and Japan, leading to a decline in the sociocultural centrality of physical remains in mortuary rituals involving the physical remains. Even in these societies, notions of the agency of the dead remain. Thus one of Kneese's respondents spoke of an uncanny feeling, comparable to seeing a ghost or interacting with a spirit, upon encountering his late girlfriend's pictures on her Facebook page. Photographs, trees, or Facebook pages create and symbolize the spiritual essences of the dead and their social agency that their loved ones have a need to preserve.

New ideas and practices of death do not enter society as replacements to be accepted or rejected, but provide new options in a broader field of possibilities for agency and negotiation. They may serve as "embellishments," such as the introduction of coffins in Bebelibe towns and villages (Merz in this volume), or turn formerly and relatively insignificant ritual items into potent symbols of modern nationalism as with the hand-embroidered towels used in western Ukrainian mortuary rites (Wanner in this volume). Change may loosen the authority of specialists, as has occurred in affluent societies like Japan or the United States (Mathews and Kwong, Kneese, Boret, Long and Buehring in this volume) as people combine elements of different practices, for example, a conservative church funeral, a green burial, and a digital cemetery. But new ideologies and technologies can also be used to reinforce claims to authority as among Acholi elders (Seebach in this volume), or may replace one powerful central agent with an even more powerful one, for example, the control by the Soviet state over the Greek Orthodox Church in western Ukraine.

As important as these new technologies and ideas are for an understanding of sociocultural change in death practices, the anthropology of death would also do well to consider more explicitly the role of human emotion. Although the experience of dying or of the death of another

would seem to be fertile ground to explore the intersection of emotion and meaning, there seems to be little work to date that goes beyond personal reflection on deaths during fieldwork (Rosaldo 1993; Kan 1989/2015; Kaufman and Morgan 2005). Beatty (2014) lays out an anthropological approach to emotion that is narrative driven and ethnographically rich, an approach that goes beyond the irresolvable debate as to whether emotion is cognitive and culturally specific or whether it is biological and universal to emphasize the time-depth and biographical elements that shape emotion. Some of the ethnographies in this volume hint at what is possible in ethnographic elicitation of narratives of death, most notably in Bacchiddu's description of the anger and guilt of the man in Apiao who had to kill his dog to maintain community solidarity in the wake of the dog's "misbehavior." Our volume suggests other avenues to exploring emotion and death in anthropology in the future: the relationship between authority and emotional labor (Kneese in this volume); the ways that technology may help mourners cope with violent and distant deaths in the creation of memory (Seebach in this volume); and the potential impact of emotional responses to innovation in death rituals where authority is widely dispersed (Long and Buehring in this volume).

In their creative constructions of new ritual forms and interpretations of death, twenty-first-century men and women facing their own death or the passing of their loved ones continue to draw on various cultural traditions, domestic and foreign, religious and secular, while also trying to make sure that the funerals they construct are meaningful to those they care about. The circle of these loved ones appears in one sense to be getting smaller with changes in migration, technology, and ideologies that emphasize individualism. The nuclear family or even smaller units and more temporary relationships are replacing the earlier corporate social units, such as clans, lineages, village communities, and so forth in the execution of mortuary ritual. Participation from a distance and even from strangers, which contemporary technology from photographs in Acholi to blogging in North America enables, can also expand the network of those who contribute to the diverse new forms, meanings, and memories that are created. In determining ritual form or defining the person of the deceased, the widely dispersed authority of acquaintances who speak at a memorial service may be weaker than the authority of a clan elder. Yet either reflects the nature of social relationships in the society in which they live, and both types of authority contribute to the creation of the post-death self, the memory of the deceased, and his or her perceived agency among the living.

Placing these case studies side-by-side points also to the unevenness of global change. They highlight how, despite the fact that cameras and cell phones are becoming commonplace in Central Africa, dying and death constitute very different experiences in the global South versus the more affluent North. One cannot escape the irony of a contrast between an American mourner blogging about her husband's last days and an Acholi widow who often may not even know where and when her husband was killed, having been caught in civil war violence. While a middle-class American widow is free to create an extensive "digital legacy" of her late husband, her counterpart from Northern Uganda would consider herself lucky to have a proper burial for hers, and a picture of his body to show to her children. The Acholi case (as well as the western Ukrainian one) is also a reminder of a sad reality of violent deaths as well as deaths that occur in situations of profound economic and social disruption that unfortunately continue to be so common in our world. In affluent societies as well, those positioned differently with respect to premature dying and violent ends might be expected to create different bricolages, resulting in various forms of mortuary ritual even within the same locality and same religion, as witnessed by differences in funerals in African-American Christian churches compared with those in churches attended predominantly by middle-class white Christians in the United States (Williams 2011). It behooves anthropologists to pay more attention to the challenges such deaths pose to the survivors and to the creative cultural solutions they are forced to come up with when these occur (see Verdery 2000; Nordstrom and Robben 1995).

Thus, questions of agency and authority also allow for an exploration of the diversity of choices within societies, and of the ambivalence experienced in communities and even within individuals (Mathews and Kwong in this volume). The widespread introduction of alternative ideologies and changing understandings of agency regarding death have led to the engagement of ordinary people in creating new ritual forms that more accurately reflect who they are, how they live(d), and how they wish to be remembered in the contemporary world. This ritual creativity in the mortuary domain seems likely to increase as internal and international mobility and migration, the use of social media and interethnic, interreligious, and intercultural communities continue to grow.

In addition to the usefulness of concepts of agency and authority in studying the ways people respond to death in contexts of change, our approach is an important contribution to the anthropology of death by

laying out a middle ground for analysis that engages both the structural and cultural factors emphasized in earlier work in the anthropology of death and the radical individualism of the study of death in some other disciplines, such as psychology. By investigating social change in specific settings, the ethnographic work in this volume gives us an important window on what Bruce Knauft calls "locally experienced modern worlds" (2013: 230). For anthropology, death is an inherently social experience, at once a significant community event and a deeply intimate experience. Concepts of agency, authority, memory, and innovation provide ways to analyze the changing relationships between past and present, and between individual and society, private and public. Death, after all, is, as one anthropologist has described (Straight 2006: 107), not only a rite of passage, but "a constant and enduring eruption into life, and, most particularly, into the living experiences of ordinary people."

NOTE

1. The originality of Hertz's approach also lies in his emphasis on this tripartite "passage," which takes place simultaneously during the ritual process, recognizing the symbolic significance of the corpse as an embodiment of social values (Parkin 1996: 105).

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Culture, Religion, and the Uses of Tradition

Fear and Prayers: Negotiating with the Dead in Apiao, Chiloé (Chile)

Giovanna Bacchiddu

The people of Apiao, a small rural island off the coast of southern Chile, have profound respect for their dead, as well as considerable fear of them, for the dead are believed to be extremely dangerous and endowed with ambivalent powers. After death, individuals turn into souls, called *animas*, which can haunt the living, unless they are properly taken care of. This chapter examines beliefs surrounding death and the dead in a small Catholic community, and the implications that death presents for the community of the living. Like God and the local miraculous saints, the dead can be both benevolent and revengeful. They can be placated with proper funeral celebrations, and through ritual offerings done within collective prayer sessions, called *novenas*. The *novenas* are ritual acts of memory performed in honor of the dead. Offerings and prayers allow the living to negotiate with the supernatural realm, to which the dead, now

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souls, belong, providing prayer rituals in exchange for tranquility and protection. Through *novenas* the living remember their dead, and they also ask their dead to remember them, and refrain from inflicting them with afflictions.

Novenas instantiate a double thread of what I called "active memory": performing acts of love and care toward dear ones, who can be alive or dead, ensures that affective ties between the living and the dead are renovated and strengthened. The value of actively "remembering" some-one through acts of love and care, constantly mentioned in everyday life between people who love each other, in the funerary context becomes crucially important, in that it represents an indispensable tool to protect the livings' well-being and screen them from potential misfortune. Through the powerful tool of negotiation, Apiao people try to overcome hierarchy by including their dangerous dead in a circle of reciprocal relationships, in which offers and requests are both made and received. Through *novenas* the dead are brought closer, and the material offerings displayed in their honor are a tribute to their memory, but also a way to please these powerful others, and persuade them to be benevolent.

During funerary rituals, negotiation also occurs at another level, that between fellow islanders. The *novenas* entail inviting and attending to many people, and spending vast amounts of resources to honor the dead. The ritual consumption of abundant food and alcohol associated with the prayers allows individuals to strengthen their alliances with other individuals, through strict reciprocity rule that governs all interactions in Apiao. In this sense, death permits the reproduction of society, and it actively propels it.

Apiao, a 13-square-kilometer island belonging to the archipelago of Chiloé, in southern Chile, has a population of approximately 700 people that live on agriculture, small animal farming, fishing, and shell and weed collecting. Apiao is completely rural, and its inhabitants, mostly indigenous people, live in scattered households surrounded by wide land plots. The island boasts two schools, a nursery, and a small, staffed health center, but its geographical distance from the nearest small town (approximately 3 hours away by boat, weather permitting), as well as the lack of centralized electricity and running water, contribute to the islanders' feelings of marginality and neglect on the part of the Chilean state. Apiao people also experience subtle forms of discrimination from townspeople, for being peasants, islanders, and indigenous, in a country where indigeneity retains a strong social and political

stigma (Bacigalupo 2007; Marimán 2012). The community's relative isolation and its geographical setup, as well as the distance from the bureaucracy of both state and Church, are undoubtedly factors that have contributed to shaping and reinforcing local social values and worldview.

The form of Catholicism practiced in Apiao is not necessarily orthodox. Centuries of history have modeled a unique version of the Catholic credo that incorporates local values and elevates them to the level of sacred, while downplaying other doctrinal aspects that are not locally resonant. A mostly unsuccessful attempt to introduce Protestant Evangelism to the island produced a strong response of self-identification from the locals, who believe that their history and their religion coincide (Bacchiddu 2009a). They claim to have always been Catholic, and religion permeates everyday life, in the sense that social imperatives and religious values are deeply intertwined and are identified as being one and the same. Inevitably, given the small-sized community and its condition of insularity, values such as egalitarianism, personal autonomy, solidarity, reciprocal exchange, and alliance obligations are elaborated and highly structured into a system that comprises a code of conduct, morality, and sacredness (see Overing 2003).

If Apiao people think of the human-human relations (at least for what concerns sociality on the island) as the perfect egalitarian situation, they are aware of the presence of hierarchy in their lives, embodied in their relations with beings that are both above and beneath them in the hierarchy. These are respectively the supernatural beings and the domesticated animals that are part of everyday life. God, the miraculous saints, the souls of the deceased, all belonging to the realm of the powerful supernatural, are engaged with in the same way as with fellow islanders, by inserting them in relations of exchange, of commitment to offer, to receive, and to reciprocate.

Looking at attitudes and practices related to the dead, considered dangerously powerful ones, this chapter tackles the tension between the imperative of sameness among fellow islanders, a constant discourse in the Apiao every day (Bacchiddu 2017), and the inevitability of facing natural hierarchies in interactions with those more powerful, and those less powerful. If Apiao people feel under the scrutiny of their dead, they have the prerogative of being in charge of beings less powerful than they, such as the domestic animals. In what follows we will look at how Apiao people manage the specificities of hierarchy that they find so problematic, and the part that negotiation plays in this aspect of sociality.

Before turning to the details of funerary rituals and beliefs, I will introduce the topic of hierarchy by discussing the attitude of people toward the death of "guilty" animals, drawing on cases of killer dogs that had to be executed by their owners to prevent them from doing further damage. As Ben Campbell puts it, "animals can serve to reflect on desires, statuses and conflicts, recognizable from 'human' perspectives as common to other sentient beings" (2013, 216).

GUILT VERSUS INNOCENCE: DEATH, PEOPLE, AND THEIR ANIMALS

Amongst all the animals that are part of everyday life in a rural setting such as Apiao, dogs cover an important role in household life and daily routine, and epitomize the perfect guardians as well as the indispensable companions on dangerous night trips. They are seen as in-between creatures and occupy a privileged position within the household bestiary. On some occasions, however, dogs allow their beastly nature to overcome the quasi-human aspect of their kind, becoming anti-social beings, verging on the monstrous. This section addresses issues of death and guilt in relation to people and their animals, and shows how the social nature of dogs ceases when anti-social behavior produces the impossibility of negotiation. While relationships between fellow islanders are articulated through constant negotiation between people who consider themselves as equals, guilty dogs represent a scenario where negotiation is impossible, allowing hierarchy to momentarily take the place of egalitarianism.

Apiao households consist of a building, the land that surrounds it, the people who live in it, and their animals. In Apiao, people and animals are strongly connected; people's daily routines are regulated by the household animals, and their subsistence is very much dependent on their chickens, pigs, sheep, cows, and finally dogs.

Women are in charge of slaughtering chickens and fish but not other animals, which are always killed by men. The women are present to help, by holding the animal while it is been slaughtered, but it is men who perform the actual killing. Women cut a fish head while the fish is still alive and jumping, boil crabs alive, or slaughter a chicken very quickly by cutting its throat and holding it while the blood gathers in a bowl. The procedure is similar with lambs, pigs, and cows, which are stabbed at the heart. People are generally at ease with such tasks, and I never observed any feeling of repugnance, unease, or embarrassment for the act of killing.

An adult man is expected to be able to kill an animal – especially a pig, something that is done on a regular basis. I once attended a pig slaughtering of a newly wed young man, who had to perform the killing of his big pig for the first time. On that occasion, his clumsy attempts at stabbing the animal in the right spot were received with much giggling and loud laughter by his friends. It was a rite of passage, his opportunity to show his status as an independent adult, and he had to prove that he was able to perform an adult's task.

While chickens, pigs, sheep, and cows provide meat and their *raison d'être* is to be consumed, dogs are weighted differently in people's daily routines. Each Apiao household has at least one, but usually several, dogs that are guard dogs and are never allowed into the house. They announce visitors by barking, and often attack newcomers, unless the host is quick enough to prevent this from happening, calling his dog and urging him to stop. Dogs are regarded as very faithful and are considered part of the family. They are always given names and nicknames, and they are talked about regularly, mentioned by name. Whenever family members go somewhere on their own, they always bring along a dog for company. The dog waits outside the visited household until his owner comes out, and then they walk back together. Dogs are always urged to accompany children, and I was often encouraged to take the dog with me to "accompany me."

While the above-mentioned animals are considered in utilitarian terms (they provide meat), dogs are viewed as in-between creatures. Despite undeniably belonging to the animal world, they are somehow viewed as closer to humans. Besides offering company, they are the ultimate providers of protection as they guard and defend the household precincts. Apiao people would feel extremely vulnerable without their dogs at their house entrances – both during the day and at night.

The following episodes are stories of dogs that allowed their beastly nature to overcome the quasi-human aspect of their kind, and as such, became highly anti-social creatures, verging on the monstrous.

"Struck by Evil Fate": Toby the Dog

Early one morning, at 7:30 a.m., while everyone was asleep, don Daniel, a neighbor and relative, announced his presence by whistling at the back of the house of my host family. He was allowed in, and while the head of the family hastened to make the fire, his wife organized *mate* drink and sliced

bread to offer the guest. "I came to offer meat," he said, "because we were struck by evil fate." People avoid visiting early in the morning, unless there is a serious reason, involving a life-threatening accident – either of a human being or of a valuable animal. The night before, don Daniel and his wife had heard dogs barking and thought it was their dog Toby, playing with their neighbors' dogs; however, they got up to double-check; and at the light of the full moon they saw a carnage: four of their sheep had been killed, two more were severely wounded, and one of them, pregnant, had already given birth to a premature lamb who was not going to survive. Toby was spotted at the massacre place: Felicia, don Daniel's wife, briefly saw her dog under the full-moon light, feasting on their own sheep. The middle-aged couple spent the rest of the night butchering the carcasses to retrieve some edible meat; Felicia tried to feed a little lamb that was left motherless. Early in the morning, don Daniel had come to visit his closer relatives and friends, offering some meat and asking for help.

Such accidents happen quite often. Cows may fall off ravines and get injured. More commonly sheep are attacked by dogs at night; those few that survive the attack die shortly afterward. If the animal is still alive, the owner slaughters it at once, and he may sell the meat to fellow islanders, in the same way as when an animal is being slaughtered for meat selling. If an animal has recently died and it is still warm, they would still butcher it, but this meat would be kept for the family circle, and never sold, since it is considered very wrong to offer the meat of a dead animal for sale.

While family members were tending to the wounded sheep, I noticed that don Daniel was tying a rope in a noose. His gestures were slow and his attitude very calm, as if to put some temporal distance between himself and what he felt he had to do. Toby was next to him, playing with the rope. The dog's destiny was signed: engaging in a far too dangerous game, he had killed the sheep of his owners, and he was now considered untrustworthy. When dogs kill once, they just keep doing it. People say: "Once they taste blood, they enjoy it and want more." And, as the man told me, "If it's your sheep to be killed, it's just loss; but sheep that belong to others, you must pay them back." To avoid such a scary prospect, the culprit dogs are always killed. Toby was a particularly nice dog; still young, he was playful, loyal, and accompanied the couple in their everyday duties. I asked don Daniel if he could possibly spare Toby's life, suggesting he could keep him tied at night (when such sheep killings usually happen), so that he could still act as the household's guard dog and accompany them

during the day. But don Daniel did not seem to agree. If he spared the dog's life and he killed again, he would be doubly responsible for allowing a killer dog to live.

While he calmly put the rope around the dog's neck, he asked me to get his wife Felicia to have her confirm that he had to kill the dog. I entered the kitchen, where the women were busy peeling potatoes. Felicia told me that she was leaving the decision to him. "Of course I love my dog, but I don't want to be responsible if something happens!" I returned to don Daniel, who was still looking pensive in the same position I had left him, with the rope in his hands. "Excuse me, be patient, go again and ask her to come here. It's better if she comes. . . . " Loud laughter welcomed me when I reentered the kitchen, and Felicia, who wasn't laughing at all, stared at me, desolate and impotent, and then followed me out.

"Tell me Felicia, are you sure you saw the dog last night?" "Yes, of course." "Should I kill him, then?" "Yes, I don't feel sorry at all. It's dangerous, he can do it again." "Fine," he said, and she ran back to the house.[1] I ran as well, but in the opposite direction, toward the neighbors' household. I was very fond of Toby, and I felt sad for this announced death. The neighbors saw me going toward their house and asked me from a distance if don Daniel was actually killing the dog. The screams of the dying dog answered their question, and they commented that it was such a lovely dog.

A few minutes later, I joined my host family and we headed home, passing by the tree with poor Toby hanging from it. The children stared at it speechless; my landlord, a sack full of mutton meat in his shoulder, asked don Daniel how much they owed him for it. "Nothing," he said, "just take it." "Fine, thank you then, Uncle." That was one of the few occasions where I heard a kinship term being uttered (see also Bacchiddu 2012a). It was an extra sign of respect, marking gratitude for the great amount of meat received. Having been struck by evil fate, as the man had put it early that morning, he had shared the meat of his dead animals with his close family.

"The Tragedy": Mueve-Mueve the Bitch

Months later, my landlord had to get rid of one of the dogs of the house, a bitch called Mueve-mueve. The name of the dog itself caused much laughter, as she was given the suggestive nickname of a local girl, who tended to sway her hips while walking.

That time, once again in the middle of the night, my landlords heard dogs barking and suspected that their sheep were being attacked. They got up and indeed found what they later described as "the tragedy." Two lambs and a sheep were torn in pieces, and once again, the housedog was spotted on the scene. This time, though, the bitch was killed immediately. "We should have killed her a while ago, because we had already seen her," my landlady told me. "This time there was no excuse. I took her and hanged her at once," my landlord said. "She knew she was guilty; she didn't object. She was dead before I hanged her." In this circumstance, attribution of senses to the animals was voiced. While the dead lambs were pitied and referred to as "innocent, guiltless creatures," the bitch was responsible for the tragedy and deserved to die immediately.

In the morning my landlord and his wife shared the news with their family; they were distressed for the loss, and for having had to spend the night slaughtering at least one sheep, in order to recover the meat.

The children, two boys aged 9 and 11, and I went to have a look at Mueve-mueve, under a tree, completely stiff, a rope tied around her neck. The children poked her with a stick, turned her round, observed her breasts, and commented on her muzzle, dirty with the lambs' blood, and soiled with the food that she had been fed the previous night. They laughed and made fun of the way she looked, calling her "the late one." Then they mounted her on a pole through her fastened legs as if she was a hunting trophy and carried the pole toward a hole that their father had dug. "Should I throw her in?" asked one of them, and the other replied, "No! Wait for me!" and they did it together. They adjusted the dead dog in the hole and their father added the dead lambs, and finally covered the hole with some earth.

Later that day, I was told many stories of dogs that kill sheep; sometimes the owners refuse to admit their responsibility and do not kill the guilty dogs. This always has negative consequences on the neighborhood's well-being. The sense of guilt attributed to the fierce animal surfaced once more. It is a shame to kill dogs; however, if they are guilty (i.e., when caught in the act), it becomes a social duty. Guilty Mueve-mueve was expecting to be punished, and she surrendered without offering any resistance. She had even been fed, they remarked; she killed out of greed, not out of hunger. She had breached the trust and confidence of her owners, betraying them by giving up her role of guard and turning into a killer of the very same sheep she was meant to protect. The children took the chance to organize their own mock funeral for the dog, transporting her to the hole, and throwing

her into it, sharing the fun of the rare event. Unlike people or events that are emotionally involving, the bitch was never remembered later on. If someone in the family happened to mention her, it just evoked loud laughter because of her name, chosen by the children.

So far I have introduced the topic of death through the relation between people and their animals, and especially people and their guilty dogs. There seems to be a correspondence between actions and their outcomes as far as dogs are involved in causing the death of innocent animals. The killer dogs are responsible for having momentarily abandoned their social, quasi-human nature, and deserve to die. This punishment is necessary in order to avoid more deaths of innocent creatures, more loss of precious resources, and further complications in social relations since the dog owners are fully responsible for their dogs' crimes, and as such, have to pay for whatever economic loss is incurred.

What differentiates people and animals? Dogs are privileged animals that guard households, accompany and protect their owners, and attack trespassers. If they betray their owners' expectations by turning into killers, this is a point of no return, a non-negotiable situation.

One of the fundamental values that make up Apiao people's way of experiencing life is the possibility of negotiation. Relationships – even kinship relations – cannot be considered established or fixed; instead they are constantly renewed and tested. This is true of relationships between people, and between people and supernatural beings (the dead, the powerful saints). In this sense, the main difference between people and animals is in the access or lack thereof to the possibility of negotiation. Guilty dogs have no possibility of negotiation, no chance to compromise and offer an alternative solution. Once the sheep have been slaughtered, either in a dangerous game or in a greed crisis, there is only one thing to do, no matter how strong the attachment to the dog.

In Apiao, relations among equal categories of human beings, that is, the fellow islanders, are characterized by equality and symmetrical reciprocity. What the dog incidents tell us is that the relations between unequal categories of beings, such as those between people and dogs and, as we will illustrate later, between people and the dead, are still marked by reciprocity, but they have to be mediated by negotiation. While the dead represent the category above humans and are extremely powerful, the dogs represent the category below humans, are less powerful than they, and their fate is dependent on behavior – just like humans with respect to the dead.

The dogs, moved from a position of inferiority to a privileged one, abuse their privilege, preying on the creatures below them, the sheep. If sociality between humans and dogs can be postulated and experienced in Apiao, this necessarily comes to a halt when the dogs compete with the humans for the consumption of resources, acting as predators rather than as guardians. The dogs' mischief is not simple misbehavior, it implies disloyalty and deceit; the dogs failed to sustain the social bond with the humans. By killing them, the humans reestablish the original hierarchy. To avoid being in the position of the unreliable dogs, or of the helpless sheep, humans take great care to attend to their relations with the dead, in an attempt to minimize their own vulnerability.

Why is this of relevance to the understanding of human-dead relation? The dog stories highlight at least two important elements. First, the consequences of guilt, affect humans and animals alike. Second, death is an important reminder of the unavoidability of hierarchy. Despite people's elaborate negotiations to bring unequal categories of beings closer, these still belong to separate domains. Their actions are ultimately unpredictable. Both elements will return in the context of the relations between the living and the dead in the following pages.

Being exposed to the death of domestic animals from an early age, overall Apiao people do not seem to find the death of animals particularly disturbing or problematic, or at least they find it cosmologically safe, that is, not bearing future consequences,[2] as opposed to the concerns they voice regarding dead people. Conversely, the dead are experienced and understood as very frightening. As creatures that used to belong to this world and now belong to a separate realm, they are perceived as dangerous and threatening to the living. This is especially true of the recently dead. However, the dead retain the power to hurt the living for several years after their departure. The following sections are devoted to the way the living articulate their relationship to the dead.

Before explaining in detail people's ideas of the dead, I will give some background on the events that follow people's death in Apiao, with a brief outline of the sequence of events and ritual celebrations.

The Funeral Celebrations

People in Apiao die because of old age, illness, or because of accidents, which often take place at sea. Deaths at sea are especially common because Apiao people ordinarily cannot swim unless they are divers.[3] It is

frequently the case that men on boats, intoxicated or sober, fall in the icy-cold water and drown. When someone dies, the family of the deceased gets busy organizing the pre- and post-funeral events. Lacking the presence of a priest, who only visits once or twice per year, local religious celebrations often revolve around the communal reciting of the rosary and litanies. Before the funeral, there are three sessions of prayers in the household of the deceased, *corpore praesenti*, that take place in the evening during three consecutive days.

These prayer events are called *velorio* (wake), and more generally *rezo* (prayer session), and consist of group recitation of two rosaries per session. They are led by one *fiscal* (a local prayer specialist) in the presence of the deceased's family and those friends and neighbors willing to join in prayers. The word *velorio* may be misleading, however, because unlike wakes on other Chiloé islands, the deceased is not accompanied throughout the night.

The three days of *rezo* culminate with the ritual of the *encajonamiento*, performed on the morning of the funeral, during which the *fiscal* puts the deceased into the coffin. In another instance of reciprocity, whoever attends the pre-funeral celebration in the deceased's household is welcomed by the bereaved with a cup of coffee and a loaf of a special oven-baked ritual bread, baked only for religious circumstances. At the same time, each person approaches the bereaved and offers condolences and a small sum of money.

After the *encajonamiento*, the dead leaves the household and all people present follow the coffin in a slow and quiet procession to the island's church. The *fiscal* leads some prayers in the church, with the coffin next to the altar, while in the cemetery that lies behind the church, the new tomb is being dug. When this is done, the coffin is taken to the cemetery and laid out with more prayers. The bereaved weep, surrounded by a group of participants of either family or neighbors, willing to accompany the dead on his last trip.

Before they leave the cemetery, the bereaved give ritual thanks to everyone for their presence and make a plea, asking all present to accompany[4] them in the prayer sessions that follow the funeral, the *novena*. The thanking and the pleading for the fellow islanders' presence is done in a ritualistic mode, with fixed formulas, and it is a symbolic way to acknowledge the importance of solidarity in major life events such as death in one's family. The presence of the community gives significance to crucial life moments that are likely to be repeated at some point in each household. One's existence is acknowledged by the community's presence, which

must in turn be acknowledged. A *novena* consists of the daily recitation of two sets of rosaries, accompanied by litanies and songs, and takes place in the house of the deceased, in the evening, for nine days. This crucially important event involves the participation of a number of people, who are solicited and asked for help by the bereaved, in a ritual form called *súplica* (plea, petition). Three *fiscales* are needed to lead the prayers and the songs to which fellow islanders sing and respond. In addition to those reciting the prayers, more individuals will be needed to accomplish various tasks, such as cooking, making and baking the ritual oven bread, and slaughtering and processing the meat to be served during the *novena*. In addition, helpers to ferry people back and forth across the canal by boat, to attend to the door, which is constantly opened and closed, and to light the lamps or, more commonly nowadays, to operate the power generator. Even more people are needed for the *novena*'s concluding night.

The largest room of the house is prepared to accommodate the *novena* altar and the visitors. The altar consists of a small table with three candles on it, which are lit before each prayer session and changed every day. The *fiscales* sit by the altar, from which they lead the prayers. In front of the altar, two sets of parallel wooden benches are organized, one for the men and another for the women, the two sets facing each other.

Every *novena* night the bereaved offer alcoholic drinks to all participants, two or three times per session. Every other night, in addition to drinks, at the end of the last rosary, a dinner – a plate of hot stew with meat – is offered to all participants, to be consumed *in loco*. The visitors eat silently, holding the plate on their laps. When the meal is consumed, they all leave the bereaved household. Salutations, thanking and dinner announcements are always done ritualistically, with fixed formulas, every night. Women and men are saluted separately.

The very last night of the *novena* is called *remate* and it differs from the other nights in that the prayer specialists and some other chosen individuals are invited to have dinner at the table directly in the *novena* salon. The table is set in front of all the participants, who take their meals on their lap, whereas those few who sit at the table are served with generous amounts of food and alcoholic drinks. In addition to the usual meal, each participant receives a takeaway gift of food, consisting of one or more one-kilo breads,[5] a piece of cooked meat and a plateful of *mazamorra*, a salty oat porridge that is made exclusively on *remate* nights. These gifts of food are intended as thank you gifts for those who "accompanied" the bereaved in their prayers. The bereaved exchange cooked food for the presence and the prayers they

Fig. 2.1 The *fiscal* Abelardo Neun and Eliana Guenchuman, table guest, with their ritual gift of bread and meat on the last night of *novena*

have been granted by the participants. At the end of each night's prayers, and especially at the end of the *remate*, the bereaved personally thank each individual sitting at the table, as well as all the helpers. This ritual is especially emotional and usually the household owner (the bereaved) weeps while pronouncing the formulaic thanks.

The *novena* is generally repeated, with the same characteristics, on the occasion of the first anniversary of death, called *cumpleaños de muerto* (dead's birthday), and again if the bereaved believe it necessary (Fig. 2.1).

"What Will the Dead Do to Me?"

Sometime in winter 2001, quite late one night, after 11 p.m., my host family and I heard someone calling outside. The head of the house, don Julio, went out to attend to the newcomers and stayed out for a good

while, while his worried wife tried to figure out what was happening by looking out the window in the next room. "God, what is it, at this time? Oh lord, it must be an accident," she kept saying. Don Julio came back in to grab his jacket and to ask one of his children to join him. The 8-year-old boy, initially reluctant, eventually followed him, and they left without a word. We waited for their return chatting by the stove. When they finally got back home, we learned the whole story: it was an old woman from the other side of the island. She had lost her way looking for the house of her son who lived in our sector, in a place admittedly difficult to find.[6] She had lost a considerable amount of money during a boat trip, having stored it together with some dried seaweed that she had collected to sell, but then lost track of the bag. She wanted to tell her son in case he could help her find it. The woman was clearly frightened in an unfamiliar place, looking for a house the exact location of which she did not know and worrying about her money. She was not alone; she had taken her grandchild to accompany her in the long night walk.

Don Julio had generously offered to take the woman to the place she was looking for and spare her wandering the whole night. His absence and the curiosity about the unusual event kept the family up despite the late hour. Everyone commented on the situation of complete defenselessness: an old woman, accompanied just by a child, at night, coming from far away. "At night, all alone, God Lord! So dangerous! Coming from the other side!" everybody kept exclaiming. Don Julio took his own child to accompany him, together with the dog – since, as I was told repeatedly, one should never go alone at night. "A dog should always accompany you at night, at least a dog," but a child is a better option. Children are innocent and they are like angels: nothing bad is meant to happen in their presence. Both don Julio and the old woman were accompanied by a child for the sake of protection and company. But why would it be dangerous for people to wander out at night, and why even more so if they do it all alone?[7] Once he got back, don Julio told us that the woman kept repeating, "What will the dead do to me?" What can the dead do?

Frightening Dead

Let us go back to the period of time when the dead is lying in her or his household, before the funeral. A sort of altar made on a table is organized in a corner of the room, and on top of it a few candles are placed and lit,

together with the ID card of the departed, an object that is intended to represent the uniqueness of the deceased individual. The dead is laid on top of the table, covered with a blanket, if it is a man or a child, and a shawl if it is a woman.[8] A white cloth (usually a sheet) is put on the wall at the back of the table, and a black cross in cloth or paper is pinned to the sheet. Sometimes some branches of a bush are pinned to the sheet as well, or plants and flowers are put at the sides of it.

Apiao people find it particularly frightening to watch a dead person; that is why they tend to avoid staying by someone's corpse in the days that precede the funeral, when the dead is kept in the house on the table. They go visiting the deceased's family, shake hands with the closest relative, and offer their condolences with the phrase "*sentido pésame,*" they then sit for the praying session that is offered for the dead before and after the funeral. Apiao people would not stand by the deceased and, especially, they would not stare at the corpse's face. Those who do are subsequently terrified[9] by the image of the dead, who appear to them in dreams. As one woman from a different Chiloé area put it, somewhat sarcastically, "In the areas of Curaco and Dalcahue, the bereaved stay by the dead; here, to give your condolences you have to look for them in the kitchen, by the fireplace . . . ." People indeed do avoid staying next to the dead as much as they can because they find it a truly terrifying experience.

I once visited don Fabricio, one of the prayer specialists, or, one of "those who know how to pray", as people say. He told me that he had learned how to pray when he was a child, having being taught by his elder brother, who is a *fiscal*. It seemed natural to ask if he would be interested in becoming a *fiscal*, given his willingness to pray in *novenas* and other religious meetings. He replied straightaway with much determination and energy, "Never! Never ever! Me? Watching a corpse on the table, move him from there and put him in his coffin? And afterward, go back to my own place? Never! Never ever! I am very scared!" I admired the man's honesty but I wanted to know why he was so scared. "'Cause I am a coward, that's it!" He then added: "A *fiscal* needs to go out at night, anywhere! I am afraid of going out all alone at night. With a companion I can go everywhere, then I am not afraid anymore, but on my own . . . never. The point is that here . . . things happen. And one is afraid."

As I discuss elsewhere (Bacchiddu 2009b), night time is a special period, when all social knowledge and codes of conduct that are valid

during the day become somehow suspended and invalidated, and the creatures of the supernatural world come out and frighten the living. Creatures of the supernatural realm, which are intermediate beings, can either be the dead, *las animas*, or witches, *brujos*. Witches are human beings endowed with special powers, who might appear as real people or as animals, but in fact are monsters in disguise. In contrast, *las animas* are souls of the dead that wander around with the intent to scare or punish the living for their ill conduct. For this reason, no one in Apiao is comfortable with the idea of going out at night, when all is dark: strange encounters may happen and people can be easily mistaken. At night people are vulnerable to the attacks of both *animas* and witches.

Dreaming the Dead

Carola, a young woman, said that she dreamt several times of Pablo, a neighbor who had recently drowned in the island's waters while swimming one afternoon with some children. Pablo's death had shocked everybody; in his early twenties, he was healthy and in good spirits. One sunny afternoon, he went swimming with some children of the neighborhood, and he drowned. Many people gathered on the beach that evening, staying with blanket-wrapped corpse, and accompanying his family until very late at night, when the police arrived from the nearby town. Carola, who lived near Pablo, said that she dreamed many times seeing him for the very last time at the beach. Pablo seemed asleep. His face was quiet and relaxed. He was still warm. In her dreams, he wore the same clothes he was wearing on that day, and addressed her directly. "Carola! You didn't even light a candle for me...." She was so confused by the realism of the vision that she jumped out of her bed and checked under it twice. After this episode, she hurried to buy candles and left them, all lit up, on top of the young man's tomb the following day.

As I previously mentioned, people seemed to be extremely frightened at the idea of staring at the dead and subsequently dreaming of them. Particularly scary are the dead whose bodies were never found, and this has often happened in Apiao, especially with the high occurrence of death at sea; those souls often appear in dreams to those who knew them in life.

The dead whose bodies were never found present a complex predicament for their family. Local beliefs suggest that haste in organizing the funeral would accelerate death if the person was still alive.

However, not celebrating the funeral and the *rezo* would result in constant wandering for the restless soul and subsequent trouble for the soul's immediate family who neglected the *anima*. I heard of several such cases; in one, the body was washed ashore several days after its disappearance.

Apiao people say that to dream of the deceased is something so terrifying and so haunting that the only way to get rid of this persecution is to organize a prayer session for the dead if he/she belongs to one's immediate family. Alternatively, if the dead is not part of the family, but is just a friend or neighbor, one can buy a set of candles and light them by the grave in the cemetery. To be spared such a terrifying experience, people avoid staring at the dead's face. "Once I stared at a corpse when he was put into the coffin...then I couldn't stop dreaming of him for several nights. I was so terrified that I had to do a *rezo* for him. Since then, I never ever stare at the dead," a woman recalled. Another woman told me that the last time she had seen a corpse on the table, a neighbor, she had dreamt several times that he got out of the coffin and ran after her. Eventually she paid for a mass to be given for him and he then stopped appearing in her dreams.

On the occasion of a funeral, I spent the day with a group of women busy baking bread to be offered to the people coming to greet the bereaved, working and chatting the time away. In Apiao, people who come to the funeral are welcomed with a cup of coffee and sent home with a large loaf of bread. One of the women said that her mother was originally from a neighboring island, where the custom was to give not only bread but also meat. Her mother had said that when she passed away, she wanted "everything to be done like it's done at her place." The wishes of the elderly, dead-to-be, take precedence over such local variations. "If she asks, it must be done." The daughter would not think of dismissing her mother's request, not only because she was an imposing character, but also because after her death she would become a soul, *una anima*. Souls punish the living if they do not accomplish what is expected.

This last episode highlights the fact that the living can be seen as soon-to-change, since they will be dead in the near future. The real shift does not occur when people die, but rather during the period following death. Death is a liminal stage, not just for the dead themselves, but also for the whole community. What matters is what happens next, after someone's death, when someone turns into an *anima*.

Vengeful Souls

So far I have introduced the widespread idea of the dead experienced and described as frightening and threatening to the vulnerable living. However, the living can prevent the *animas* from having reasons to disturb them by attending to the dead "the way it's supposed to be done."[10] I have also shown the burdensome commitment the prayer sessions represent for the bereaved who, in addition to their loss, are expected to spend considerable amounts of resources, energy, and time to properly attend to the community that accompanied them in the funeral celebrations.

Why are the living expected to do so much, work so hard, and spend time and resources so abundantly for the dead? During my stay on the island, an old man died, leaving behind his wife in her nineties and several grandchildren with whom the old couple had been living. The funeral was quite emotional, with much pathos and loud crying. Once at home, we commented on the day's events and my hosts remarked that from the amount of crying, one would not suspect that the man was anything but nice. "They cried so much for him, and yet he was a bad man" and even "Why did they cry so much for him, that wicked person!" Indeed, the man's granddaughter had cried loudly in a powerful display of ritual weeping. Her husband stood quietly behind her and did not try to console her in any way. She was expected to mourn her relative, and a proper mourning implies weeping for the deceased regardless of his character.

On a similar subject, I was once surprised to hear what appeared to be contradictory comments on a deceased relative and his funeral. One of the young girls of my host family asked her mother, "At this point, grand-father will be in hell,[11] right?" The comment was in line with the information I had on the old man. He had been nasty, stingy, and had always opposed my landlady's marriage to his son, making her life difficult, according to what she often told me. And yet, when he died, the woman – his daughter-in-law – was the only family member to organize his funeral, as well as organizing and paying for the *novena* to be prayed. "We did a three-day *novena*," she said, "but with three rosaries per day, so that counts like nine days: the *fiscales* are paid as for a nine-day praying." She was very keen on letting me know that she had dealt with the matter "the way it is supposed to be done." She even took me to the cemetery

and made a point of showing me her in-laws' tomb that she had ordered and paid for. Made with the best material, it was, at the time, one of the few tombs in the cemetery that had photos of the deceased framed – a fairly common occurrence nowadays.

And yet, although the old man's cruelty was often pointed out, people never acknowledged what he left (plenty of land and animals) for the family. Why take so much pain to organize prayer meetings, pay for a better-than-average tomb, if the deceased was not only not appreciated in life, but consistently criticized after death?

"The souls [of the dead] are vengeful … some people don't do a proper *rezo* in order to save money, and they don't realize that later on the souls will send a punishment … and one's animals will start to die … never look at the expense, or think of saving, never," my friend Maria told me. People strongly disapprove of those who do not fulfill their duties concerning the dead. If someone dies, and the family does not attend properly to the guests who arrive for the funeral, the community comments on the event in negative terms. Once a woman was reported to be so stingy that when her ill husband died, she did not want to slaughter one of her animals, to avoid the expense. The same woman, on the occasion of her husband's first death anniversary, apparently preferred to buy frozen chicken from the nearby town to prepare dinner for the guests. Such behavior is considered highly inappropriate and it calls for revenge on the part of the dead, everyone agreed. Just like the powerful, miraculous saints whose powers are regularly acknowledged and celebrated on the island (see Bacchiddu 2011), *animas* have ambivalent powers. They can benefit, help, and protect the living, or they can take revenge on them, if they are not properly taken care of (see also Hertz [1960] 2004, 36–37).

Another example of the powerful understanding of *las animas* is expressed in the way Clara, a notoriously lazy woman, was talked about by the community. She was considered quite selfish and had never been able to take care of her own household properly. She was often seen aimlessly walking around the island. Clara was often just looking for someone to do her own chores for her since she was incapable of doing what most Apiao women regularly do: work in the fields, process and smoke fresh meat, collect shellfish, make baskets, weave, and so on. In addition to these flaws, she was guilty of having seriously neglected her late parents after her marriage.

She had received a lot from them. In her first years of marriage, she would constantly leave her children with her mother or with her neighbor. This is common practice on the island; however, it also calls for a return. Clara had been keen to ask for help and benefit from her own mother's and a kind neighbor's generosity. However, once those women became aged and needed help of different sorts, she had neglected them. She had never reciprocated and was often criticized for it. People uniformly condemned Clara's anti-social behavior. They agreed that she will have to pay for her deeds, and that she should expect some misfortune to fall upon her, caused by her own meanness, lack of respect and neglect of the common code of conduct.

The necessity to reciprocate is a recurrent theme in Apiao ethnography, and, as I have elsewhere discussed (Bacchiddu 2009a, 2011, 2012b), is the fundamental social rule as well as the base for social stability and ultimately, the essence of social relations on the island. In such a small setting, people constantly need one another's help, participation, or support, and everybody willingly offers their help because they are aware that at some point it will be their turn to be in need. Social life in Apiao revolves around concentric circles of reciprocity and obligations, which are constantly renovated and negotiated.

Whenever an individual asks something of another individual, a sort of unbalance is created. Until the favor is returned, there is a breach in the equilibrium that is somehow interrupted and made precarious. People are aware of such imbalance and generally have clear memories of any dues. They know that if they procrastinate in paying their debts, at some point they will have to deal with the consequences of their action. Failure to reciprocate calls forth social disruption, a state of social disorder and disharmony.

If reciprocity obligations are crucial amongst fellow islanders, whenever exchange transactions have to do with the supernatural – the dead and the miraculous saints – there is an aspect of awesome sacrality at play. All asymmetries must always be balanced back, and to leave obligations unfulfilled is not only wrong, but also dangerous. The notion of exchange evoked here is quite powerful, in that it has to do with *animas*. No longer part of the community of the living, they belonged to the realm of the souls, and, as people repeated, the souls are revengeful (Fig. 2.2).

Fig. 2.2 Erica Velasquez and her niece Tamara Calbuante, lighting candles on an old family tomb, after having placed a freshly made flower crown

THE DAY OF ALL SAINTS AND OF ALL SOULS

There is one opportunity during the calendar year for every family to take care of their dead; to "remember" them, as Apiao people say. On the occasion of the two consecutive dates of November 1st and 2nd, the days of All Saints and All Souls, respectively, most families head to the cemetery, take care of the family tombs, and organize praying sessions to honor and remember their dead. This is considered an important occasion to ensure the ancestors' contentment.

The Apiao cemetery lies on a square piece of land at one side of the imposing church, not far from the beach. It is surrounded by a wooden fence, enclosing all Apiao tombs, and Apiao dead. Most tombs nowadays are rectangular boxes made in cement, with a small hut-shaped headstone. The headstone is generally made with a glass window that opens to allow candles to burn inside, sheltered from the wind and rain. Toward the back of the cemetery there are some older tombs that do not have any cement: they are just surrounded by wooden fences, and look like cradles, or

children's beds. In every single tomb, there is a tall wooden cross with the name and the age of the deceased painted or engraved on it.

Apiao people do not visit the cemetery often, even if they pass in front of it every day or several times per day, coming and going from one side of the island to the other, or on their way to the ramp where boats leave and arrive. People go to the cemetery if there is a funeral, to accompany the family of the deceased when the coffin is laid in the ground, or occasionally, when some activity such as a football match takes place in the church esplanade. On such occasions people take a walk to pay a quick visit to their dead, check the tomb and remove leaves and small branches that the wind has deposited. Sometimes people spend a few minutes to light candles to their deceased relatives. It is not uncommon for passers-by to see dim candle lights animating the cemetery on pitch-dark nights. The only other time of the year when Apiao people devote an entire day to their dead relatives is on November 1st and 2nd, when the cemetery becomes a focus of people's attention.

Toward the end of the month of October, in springtime, when the days are longer, warmer, and the green grass is tall, people start to get organized for the day when all the souls will be remembered. They go to the cemetery and start to clean their family tombs. They remove all weeds that grew by the tombs of their relatives during the year and sweep away all rubbish that has accumulated. Most families repaint the family tombs, often choosing vivid colors such as orange, blue, or red that are left over from painting their house or boat. The fresh paint conveys an overall impression of order and cleanliness. Women collect fresh flowers and green branches and make beautiful crowns with them, usually one per dead relative. They are put on the cross of each tomb, taking the place of the old, dried crowns of the previous year.

When November the 1st, the Day of All Saints, arrives, the cemetery becomes a colorful place, clean and tidy, filled with crowns of leaves and flowers, and with people. While All Souls' Day is on November the 2nd, some people choose to dedicate the Day of the Saints to their dead to avoid the crowd of the following day. Late in the morning of the 1st, people go to the cemetery bringing their fresh crowns, candles, some food and drink, and some money. Here they always find some of "those who know how to pray", ready to perform prayers and songs upon request. Along with the two island *fiscales*, a number of other people go to the cemetery to offer their prayers upon request; the families ask one of the prayer specialists if they will pray for their dead, and specifically request the number of rosaries they want to be recited. Prayers are proffered by the prayer specialist, who sits or kneels by

the tomb, holding his prayer booklets and his rosary. Then the whole family sits nearby, joining in the prayers, sometimes silently and sometimes out loud. Everybody is wearing his or her best clothes, with a bottle of *chicha*[12] or wine at their side as well as some bread, to give along with some money to the prayer specialist as a thank you gift. While on November the 1st the cemetery is animated but quiet, on the 2nd the little piece of land becomes extremely crowded, and clusters of people sit at their relatives' tombs either attending a personal prayer session or waiting for one of the specialists to arrive at their tomb. "Those who know how to pray" reach the cemetery as early as 7 a.m. and give appointments to people who request their services. At the peak of the day, the busy soundscape of parallel voices singing the same songs and reciting the same prayers is truly remarkable and audible from a distance, as Harris (1982, 54ff) described as well for Bolivia.

At the end of the session, which lasts approximately half an hour, someone from the family asks the praying official what is owed. He generally replies, "*Su voluntad no más*" ("I'll be happy to take whatever you want to give me"). According to the usual imperative of exchange, it is fundamental

Fig. 2.3 Rosendo Millalonco, prayer specialist, praying at a family tomb on Souls Day

to have to pay for their service since every action in Apiao calls for a return. Even the families of the specialists are expected to pay. The wife of one of the *fiscales* was sitting on her family tomb on Souls Day, waiting for a someone to come to pray for her family. When asked the reason she did not have her own husband pray, she vehemently replied that prayers must be paid for, otherwise they lose efficacy. It is almost as if one is tricking the dead, cheating. Those who have received something (in this case, prayers for their dead) must give something in exchange that involves an expense, a sacrifice, some sort of expenditure. This is why a *fiscal* cannot do his own prayers: there would be no transaction, no exchange involved (Fig. 2.3).

PROTECTION: VULNERABLE DEAD AND VULNERABLE LIVING

Not only must there be sacrifice, the importance of the collective and public recitation of prayers within the context of the relation between the living and the dead (and with powerful entities such as the miraculous saints) cannot be underestimated. Besides the recitation of the rosary, which is always done collectively, the prayers for the dead consist of the repetition of long lists of litanies and invocations to various figures of saints, Virgin Mary, and Christ in different roles (such as Christ of the agony, Mary lady of suffering, and similar). All these recitations are uttered in front of an audience that repeats and co-recites the individual prayers. Parts of the repertoire are religious songs that are sung specifically in funerary contexts and whose themes revolve around the protection and safety of the souls. The prayers typically wish the souls to have their pain alleviated and to rest in peace. Finally, the various religious figures are addressed in the hope that the souls attain salvation. While salvation is never a topic of concern or discussion in Apiao, it certainly is a recurrent theme in the funerary prayers and songs. The living intercede for the dead in a period in which they are believed to be at their most vulnerable and in need of protection.

The vulnerability of the dead, a classic theme (Hertz 2004 [1960], 33–34), is portrayed in the religious prayers and songs performed in Apiao during mortuary rituals. It also has a further dimension related to local witchcraft beliefs, quite strong throughout Chiloé in general (León León 2007). Up until recently in Apiao, the dead used to be guarded in the cemetery by close relatives for a number of days after burial in order to prevent the attacks from witches. The recently dead were believed to be particularly vulnerable and subject to the attention of

witches willing to collect the dead bodies in order to peel the skin off them. The skin would be used to fabricate the *macuñ*, a jumper that the witches use to fly (see also Rojas Flores 2002; Cárdenas Álvarez 1998; Tangol 1976). The presence of close relatives at the tomb prevents evil forces from taking the corpses and protects the vulnerable dead.

There seems to be a double thread of protection playing out in the relationship between people and their dead. The living strive to protect the recently dead by accompanying them with a proper funeral and proper sets of prayers, repeated various times on different occasions. The living do all they can to honor their dead and accompany them in the period subsequent to their passing. However, the dead turn into souls, *animas*, and can haunt, frighten, and harm the living if they are not properly remembered after death.

"Remembering" as I have elsewhere elaborated (Bacchiddu 2012a), is a crucial value for Apiao people. It is through what I call "active memory" that relatedness is experienced and ultimately validates and articulates relationships.[13] "Remembering [someone]" is a concept that is constantly expressed in Apiao. To describe someone generous and caring, the concept "remembering" is used. When someone receives visitors from distant places, the appropriate formula to express gratitude includes "thanks for remembering us." Remembering does not simply indicate memory, but consists of regular, material gestures of love and care: visiting, offering gifts, calling. Active memory is more important to relationships than kinship ties, and it is necessary in order to maintain connections between people. This crucial concept is expressed in the funerary context in the way the living care for their dead. Active memory is not limited to life but goes beyond, as funeral celebrations exemplify. Through these celebrations the living are "remembering" their dead, taking care of them the way it should be done. At the same time, however, they are protecting themselves. In fact, all the effort that the living put into organizing and performing collective prayers is done in order to prevent the souls' wrath and to protect themselves from the powerful *animas* (see also León León 2007 and, for the Bolivian highlands, Harris 1982).

Ritualistically praying for the dead is a powerful double act of memory. By praying in the *novena*, the living remember their dead, and they make the dead remember them – hence, they attempt to convince their dead to leave them in peace. Prayers for the dead represent the chance the living have to negotiate with the dead; by engaging in an exchange interaction, they ensure their own tranquility.

Alliances

A badly attended prayer session jeopardizes the negotiation between the living and their dead, and implicitly reveals the lack of alliances between the family of the bereaved and the rest of the community. "We used to go so much [to funerals and *novenas*]. And now no one wants to accompany us...." These words were spoken by the mourning mother of little Sara, a 1-year-old child who died in the winter of 2003. The woman was commenting on the absence of fellow islanders, minutes before the funeral rituals started. Some people had arrived, and several others were waiting outside the household. In hearing her remark, they entered the little room and sat on the benches, while the *fiscal* started with the appropriate set of prayers to bid farewell to the "little angel" as dead children are called.

Because prayers need to be collective, the presence of the community at funerary rituals validates the efforts made by the bereaved and gives full sense to the celebration. As such, it is humiliating and painful to celebrate a funeral without the support of the community, especially for a particularly tragic case, as little Sara's funeral. As Evans-Pritchard reminded us, "Death is not only a natural fact but also a social fact" (1976, 25). If praying sessions in honor of the dead mark a necessary separation between the dead and the living, and highlight the ritual necessity of severing a link (Van Gennep 2004 [1960], Hertz 2004 [1960]), and of turning the dead from social beings to *animas*, on the other hand, praying rituals are a celebration of communal ties. The celebrations for the dead are social occasions where alliances are tested, confirmed, and strengthened – or weakened. Social life in Apiao revolves around such events, and it is in these specific gatherings that the community has a precious opportunity to connect. The principles that frame the *novenas* are centered upon food and drink offering and receiving. This island community is in fact grounded on such interaction: the offer of food, drinks, and service in exchange for food, drinks, and more service. Goods and help circulate constantly; what changes is the occasion. The same people are constantly involved in one way or another, given the limited number of people living on the island. In this sense, prayer rituals are a way to regenerate alliances, to perpetuate social relations, or to untie them, depending on the way people make use of the negotiation tool.

The formula used by the bereaved to plead for the community's presence at the *novena* includes the verb "to accompany" (*acompañar*). It is

the community's presence that gives full meaning to a ritual celebration. The bereaved, with humble facial expression and contrite tone of voice, express their request to the community, acknowledging their need to be accompanied in this ritual duty.

Attendance at funerals and *novenas* for the dead is in sharp contrast to church attendance on Sundays or for various holy days of the liturgical calendar. A priest from the nearby town only travels to the island once or twice per year. However, the two *fiscales* often open the church and recite some prayers on Sundays, regularly throughout the year. In spite of this, hardly anyone takes part in the Sunday church prayers. In Apiao, people tend to leave their homes and their everyday duties only for a good reason. Taking part in *novenas* is a very good reason because of the reciprocity rule: one is either returning a favor or creating the possibility of being returned the favor in the future. Going to church is an action that does not make room for such interaction, and, in a sense, is a dead end.

Whenever a *novena* is celebrated in a private house, the attendance is overwhelming; this is particularly striking to the eyes of a newcomer, more prone to notice the seeming lack of social life on the island. Besides accepting the *súplica* invitation, which is rarely if ever turned down, participation of fellow islanders to the rituals connected to the dead is always very strong, and it is strongly expected by the bereaved. Indeed, people remember exactly who attended a *novena* they hosted. When someone neglects what is considered a moral obligation, complaints are voiced, and someone's absence at a funeral is always noticed. The following vignette explains these sorts of expectations.

Our neighbor came to see my host family the day after a funeral. She sat with us beside the stove, and we talked about the previous day's funeral. All those who had been present were enumerated, together with the possible reasons for the absence of those who always participate, and the motivations behind the usual absentees. The women's comments on who was present at the funeral, and who was not, go beyond recording an event. They were pointing out the imbalance they felt in people's behavior, and their failure to fulfill the imperative of reciprocity. Going to a funeral is, in their words, "something returned." The proper person knows that just like they expect people to attend funerals in their own homes, they should be compassionate and express support and solidarity whenever it is called for. Everybody will, at some point, need support; therefore one should always fulfill expectations because at some point it might as well be their turn.

Conclusion: Remembering, or Forgetting?

In a seminal article, Anne Christine Taylor (1993) wrote that lowland Amerindians are noticeable for spending enormous amounts of time and effort to forget their dead, to render them anonymous, to obliterate them. The past is avoided rather than celebrated, and instead of looking for continuity or links with the ancestors, they stress the remoteness and separation of the dead from the world of the living. They strive to forget their dead, but they remain, at the same time, obsessed with their presence. Taylor notices that this behavior is found in several societies around the world. What is, however, peculiar to Amerindians is that they on the one hand emphasize the radical discontinuity between the living and the dead, and on the other consider the dead as an ever-present other, part of a social group with which the living constantly interact. According to Taylor, this involves having to deal with contradictory psychological processes: forgetting the dead as familiar, alive beings – that is, acknowledging that they have passed away and therefore are not part of the society of the living, and at the same time, thinking of them as partners in a relation of exchange, as beings whose presence is still active in the living's world (Taylor 1993, 653–654).

The observations made by Taylor strengthen and enrich my reading of the Apiao data. The alternating preoccupation with forgetting the dead (by avoiding being near them, staring at them, touching them, etc.) *and* with remembering them, through the careful and detailed organization and execution of prayer rituals, in sequence and for years subsequent to someone's death, is an accurate description of Apiao people's "contradictory psychological processes" with respect to their dead.

The dead in Apiao need to be attended with proper funerary rituals, so that their souls are released and do not suffer any agony, as the appropriate local Catholic songs express. But, as I have argued in this chapter, the living do this not only to care for the dead, in honor of the supreme value of "remembering" loved ones. They also do it in order to ensure their own well-being, their own survival in life. Once departed, the loved ones cease being relatives, friends, or neighbors and turn into a dangerous form of otherness, *animas*, whose existence represents a vague, but constant threat for the living.

This chapter reveals Apiao people's attitude toward death, and the dead, who are loved and cared for, but also feared and considered

dangerous. The dead can protect or haunt the living, depending on the care they receive (or the lack of it), as well as the "active memory" both of which the living offer the dead through prayers and *novena* rituals. In order to avoid retaliatory attacks from the dead, the living carefully arrange post-mortem rituals, funeral celebrations, and death anniversary celebrations, and to that endeavor, they collect and make use of large amounts of resources. These represent the most substantial expenses Apiao people will ever incur in their lives. People never complain nor comment on the amount of produce needed and used to attend to their religious duty toward the dead; instead they often commit through a vow to spend more than necessary in order to make sure they please the dead, and *novenas* are often abundance feasts of a *potlatch* nature.

The dead need to be pleased if the living are to be spared problems of various natures, whether regarding one's health, wealth, or productivity. In Taylor's words, the living need to remember their dead (through prayer rituals), to be able to forget them (in everyday life). The living acknowledge their vulnerability while knowing that it can be overcome through negotiation, and exchange.

Through negotiation, individuals engage powerful others in relationships of reciprocity and exchange, they promise and fulfill; they ask and offer something in exchange. The tool of negotiation is a specifically human instrument that Apiao people continuously rehearse in their everyday activities involving life in society, constantly adjusting the boundaries that separate them and take them closer to one another, defining and redefining relationships, that are seen in a constant state of flux. At the time of death rituals, alliances between fellow islanders are made, renewed, or unmade, illustrating how relationships between people are articulated through negotiation. The same powerful tool, negotiation, is employed in the relationship people entertain with the potent supernatural beings such as the dead. This same chance, however, is not offered to the guilty dogs that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter: by betraying their owners' trust, they lost their privileged status of in-between creatures, their quasi-human characteristics, and chose to follow their low, bestial instincts, breaking a pact, and reaching a point of no return. The living do with their guilty dog the exact opposite of what they do with their dead: while the dead are incorporated in the web of relations that connect the living to each other, the killer dogs are expelled from the society of humans, reminding people of the existence of hierarchy and authority, strongly downplayed through the tool of negotiation.

Notes

1. The wife pretended she was not affected by the prospect of losing her dog to facilitate her husband's duty. She was, in fact, very fond of the dog, and she continued to think about him long after his death.
2. Besides the possibility of social conflict mentioned earlier.
3. Only a small percentage of Apiao men are divers. Interestingly Bridges (1951, 63) describes how the Yahgan men of Tierra del Fuego could not swim, and it was the women that were expert swimmers and moved the canoes about, from the sea to the shore and vice versa, swimming with their babies on their backs in the icy waters.
4. To accompany, *acompañar*, indicates the act of solidarity of fellow islanders in moments of need, such as participating to funerals *novenas*, or other religious *novenas*.
5. The *novena* organizers take a note of those in attendance and of the number of nights they attend. Depending on this, the visitors may receive one or two loaves of bread. There is always some sort of balanced reciprocity in the relations people entertain with each other, and actions call for tangible returns, like this case exemplifies.
6. While nowadays a simple phone call might have solved the issue, at the time hardly anyone on the island had a mobile phone; currently most individuals in Apiao own mobile phones, except the elderly.
7. In Apiao the crime level is very low or even unknown; the perceived danger was clearly related to a supernatural issue.
8. A shawl is commonly a woman's garment that she uses to wrap around her body.
9. Despite the fact that the dead are considered dangerous and are feared, there is no trace of the disgusted reactions and the repugnance described by Harris for the Bolivian highlands (1982, 50ff), nor of taboos or prohibitions related to death and contact with the dead.
10. For an elaboration of the concept of "doing things properly" and how it simultaneously applies to social and religious life in Apiao, since these two aspects overlap, see Bacchiddu (2012b; and also, 2009a).
11. That was the first and only time I heard the word "hell" being mentioned during my stay in Apiao.
12. Locally made apple cider.
13. I am here just referring to relatedness as the way people relate to each other, rather than to the theoretical debate on kinship/relatedness discussed and illustrated in Carsten (2000). For a discussion on relatedness as kinship in Apiao, see Bacchiddu (2012a).

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Quelling the "Unquiet Dead": Popular Devotions in the Borderlands of the USSR

Catherine Wanner

Modern societies have increasingly sought to marginalize, control, and even deny the experience of death. In contrast, the conditions of socialist modernity in the USSR tended to intensify the experience of death. Death figured prominently in the everyday lives of Soviet citizens during the creation, expansion, and sustained existence of the USSR. Some have argued that there was an "epidemic of death" in St. Petersburg prior to the Revolution of 1917. This was endemic to the zeitgeist of the period and provided the inspiration for the quest for immortality and vanquishing of death, two goals that came to permeate Soviet ideology.[1] In Ukraine, a cult of death, along with a code of victimization, also became emblematic of the Ukrainian nation. The national anthem of the Ukrainian People's Republic, a short-lived independent state that fell in 1920, was entitled "Ukraine has not yet Died" (*Shche ne Vmerla Ukraina*). Although the song was outlawed in the USSR, it was chosen once again in 1992 to be the anthem of an independent Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR.

Some years later in 2003, the anthem was amended to underline that it was the "glory" and "freedom" of Ukraine that had not yet died, not

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Ukraine itself. The clarification was needed in that Ukraine, as a border-land region, sustained so much bloody violence and death in the twentieth century that historian Timothy Snyder (2010) referred to this region as the "bloodlands." Death, and in particular "bad death," was ubiquitous. During World War II many innocent civilians became dead bodies that were frequently treated with irreverence, often anonymously and hapha-zardly thrown into mass graves without any markers (Winter 1998; Merridale 2000; Wingfield and Bucur 2006). At the close of World War II, questions about how to reckon with evil, explain suffering, and acknowledge those who had sacrificed their lives loomed large. At this moment of monumental loss of individual life, the erasure of entire ethnic groups, and the vanishing of a way of life, grieving, mourning, redemp-tion, and resurrection were particularly salient themes expressed in death rituals.

This chapter draws on ethnographic and archival materials from the three western Ukrainian oblasts, Lvivs'ka, Zakarpats'ka, and Chernivets'ka, which were annexed to the USSR from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania during World War II, to explore the practices associated with death rituals. In these regions, the vicious brutality and wanton slaughter of soldiers and civilians alike during the War was followed by occupation, forced annexation, and massive displacement as these territories were integrated into the USSR. Incorporation into the USSR also meant sweeping political and economic change. A new ruling party ideologically justified the rapid intro-duction of socialist redistribution mechanisms and new hierarchies of govern-ance, radically remaking patterns of everyday life after the War (Fig. 3.1).

Not only was social life transformed, but the experience of dying was too. Soviet ideology translated into practice meant policies that advanced the reduction or, in the case of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the elimination of the legal functioning of institutionalized religion. The ability to openly evoke the transcendent and other divine forces with the help of clergy, sacred objects, and with the authority of traditions handed down from an established religious institution were compromised or even eliminated. The vastly reduced recourse to institutionalized forms of wor-ship and devotion enhanced the importance of informal ritual practices to commemorate death. Soviet antireligious policies also undermined trust in institutional religious structures and discouraged appeals to clergy, which further encouraged informal ritual improvisation when individuals and groups took charge of grieving and mourning the losses death bequeathed them.

Fig. 3.1 Political map of Ukraine Wikimedia commons, https://commons.wiki
media.org/wiki/Maps_of_Ukraine#/media/File:Ukraina_map_polish.png

Diverse responses to such popular religious practices that occurred outside the Church divided the clergy and made the Church an easier target for repression. Yet, it was also the prominence of these popular forms of religious practice that sustained the religious sensibilities and religious proclivities of the population during the Soviet period when more formal avenues of religious devotion were closed (Beglov 2008; Levitin-Krasnov 1970). Ongoing popular religious practices allowed forms of resistance that drew on religious symbols and ideals to take root at various points in the second half of the twentieth century, and most spectacularly beginning in the late 1980s. These dynamics distinguish the commemoration of death in this region from many others in Europe and elsewhere.

I consider death rituals to be a vitally important form of "lived religion" that served multiple functions. They were public performances of collective and individual grief. Death rituals established connections among the recently deceased, previous generations, and the living. They connected

generations to one another by reaffirming beliefs in ancestral spirits and made these ethereal supernatural forces manifest and visible in material form in the course of ritual and ritualized behaviors. Once these regions became part of the USSR, these links among generations formed a collective to ensure mutual well-being that was increasingly imagined as "national" as opposed to local. Death rituals took on a gendered dimension as well. Women increasingly assumed responsibility for not only expressing grief but also for organizing ritualized behaviors to commemorate the dead.

Most notably, commemorations of death served to slow the effectiveness of Soviet antireligious campaigns, which sought to block the transmission of knowledge of religious practices and beliefs in an effort to reorient the procurement and production of knowledge to science and away from sensorial experiences of otherworldliness. As such, death rituals played a particularly important role during the Soviet period in sustaining the vitality of popular religious practices. Moreover, such popular religious practices informed the delineation of "national" differences among a Soviet population that was supposed to embody a supraethnic, citizen-based identity. Overt ritual commemoration of the dead represented an ongoing forum where Soviet citizens were willing to rebuke the threats of a repressive state in order to evoke supernatural forces to quell the potential powers of the "unquiet dead."

THE CERTAINTY AND UNCERTAINTY OF DEATH

Death is one of the very few universal human experiences, and it is shrouded with both great certainty and unrelenting uncertainty. We know that we will all experience death. Yet, with almost equal levels of uncertainty, we are left to wonder what experiences will follow death. Death poses the ultimate challenge for rendering human experience meaningful, especially the suffering associated with death, and for this reason it has been the subject of extensive anthropological inquiry in this region (Danforth 1982; Kligman 1988; Huntington and Metcalf 1991; and Robben 2004). Because death is veiled in mystery and has the power to evoke so many powerful emotions that prompt certain behaviors, it is a prime arena for shaping social relations, and in particular the dynamics of remembering and forgetting, indebtedness and obligation. Deliberate efforts to honor the dead with decorated graves are among the earliest forms of cultural innovation that have continued unabated across time and across cultures.

Religion is central to the management of death. Death is as disruptive as it is transformative, which is why it must be managed and demands a response from those who survive. Rituals restore the customs and rhythms of everyday life after death, but in doing so they transform what they set out to preserve. Like all rites of passage, death rituals signify a change in the status of participants. Through ritual a body becomes an unambiguously dead corpse, and a firm, rigid boundary is established between the living and the dead. Until a proper burial is conducted, suspicions linger as to whether or not the body is fully dead and the spirit is quiet. Ritualized behaviors transfer a body into a new and uncontested category, when, for example, a husband becomes a corpse. Death also transforms the status of the living. Keeping with the same example, a wife becomes a widow, children become orphans, and they all assume other social roles. The ritual enactment of a response to death offers a means to reconstruct the stability of the social order in view of the loss. Rituals reconnect the living with the dead, the body with the soul, action with emotion, and in the process, close the emptiness left by the loss. It is the removal of doubt as new, unambiguous categories are ushered in that provides comfort to those who mourn. Ironically, it is the very material and public enactment of death rituals that underpins the very elusive and immaterial existence of spirits. The materiality of rituals allows for the visibility of otherwise invisible, yet sensorially experienced, connections to the dead. Through ritual enactment, the dead are conceptualized as ancestors to whom the ritual practitioners feel a connection and sense of reciprocal obligation.

Secularization and the Links Between Generations

The performance of death rituals in Soviet Western Ukraine in the postwar period created multiple tensions. First, in this multi-ethnic, multi-confessional region, a true meeting point of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires, religion had become a key marker of identity, which meant that the Soviet secular remake of society encountered resistance. Most Ukrainians in this westernmost region of Soviet Ukraine were Greek Catholics, but there were also considerable Orthodox, Jewish, Protestant, and other faith groups present. Conducting rituals that were considered religious by a state that claimed to be invested in promoting atheism placed the practitioner in conflict with ideological goals and courted repression from state authorities. In 1946 the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was outlawed,

driven underground, and eventually neutralized in the early 1950s, making it the largest religious group in the world to be outlawed, a status it would hold until 1989. During most of the Soviet period, the nearly five million Greek Catholic believers in Soviet Ukraine could only turn to the Russian Orthodox Church. As early as 1956, even prior to Khrushchev's antireligious campaign of 1958–1964, approximately 3,000 of the officially functioning 3,215 churches in five western oblasts (Lvivs'ka, Drogobychs'ka, Stanislavs'ka, Ternopil's'ka, and Zakarpats'ka) were handed over to the Russian Orthodox Church.[2] Nearly 1,000 of the 1,254 priests serving in those churches were former Greek Catholic priests, who were often held in suspicion by the authorities.[3] The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, however, thrived in diaspora communities, especially in North America (Luciuk 2000).

Such repressive treatment by a resented state only fed the significant moral and political authority the church and clergy enjoyed in this region and heightened the feelings of grief at every loss.[4] The importance of religion and the authority of the clergy were driven by a volatile history of nationalism and repeated, unsuccessful attempts to secure independent statehood and increased cultural autonomy. The persistence of a frustrated nationalist agenda fueled a pronounced tendency to fuse religion with culture and religious revival with ethnic resurgence. Therefore, for the over seven million residents of this annexed region attacks on certain religious institutions were equated with attacks on the nation and even on the self.

In the early years of Soviet rule, atheist campaigns, in closing down churches and diminishing clerical authority, inadvertently served to reinvest some of this authority in the *tserkovniki*, or devout, active lay believers (Freeze 2012). This same dynamic was put in place in Western Ukraine after annexation, and largely remained in place throughout the Soviet period. As a result, religious practice, much like in Europe and North America, became more individually tailored, improvised, and regionally variable. Ironically, this shifted some of the burden of secularizing the public sphere to the Russian Orthodox Church itself, which struggled to delineate officially sanctioned burial practices from "superstition" and to prohibit the infraction of deviant folk practices into "true religious ceremony." In this way, the goals of Soviet antireligious campaigns, which included eliminating public displays of popular religious practice, overlapped with the Russian Orthodox Church. This meant that the secularization of death rituals, which included a reining in of evocations of the sacred and appeals to the benevolence of spirits, was not always "forced," but was sometimes "taught" or "persuaded" into existence, even by religious leaders themselves.

We know from multiple sources, but especially the archival records of Soviet officials charged with eliminating the public face of religion in Soviet society, that removing religious involvement in funerals was far more difficult than reducing the religious components in other rituals to mark lifecycle changes, such as births or weddings. Rituals associated with marking death are among the most conservative and resistant to change of all rites of passage. The need to acknowledge the existence of ethereal supernatural forces and ancestral spirits with material manifestations in ritual performances was pressing, which simultaneously meant that death rituals continued unabated in spite of the repressive tactics of surveillance that were designed to eliminate the material and visible evocations of divine or supernatural forces.

Conversely, the Soviet government used religious objects, such as relics, and religious concepts, including immortality and transcendence, to bolster its legitimacy by, for example, embalming Lenin to symbolize a triumph over death and the numerous war memorials to unknown soldiers intimating sacrifice, eternal glory, and transcendent salvation. So, the commemoration of death, be it individual and improvised, ethnic and oppositional, or Soviet and sanctioned, was among the most resistant to Soviet efforts to secularize society. There was persistent resistance to removing the visible presence of transcendental, otherworldly and supernatural elements of power associated with death.

I have argued elsewhere that the cumulative effect of Soviet antireligious policies was to produce ignorance of the formalities of religious practice by disrupting the transmission of religious knowledge among generations more so than reducing belief in God or veneration of sacred beings, objects, and places (Wanner 2007: 48–54). That is to say, the doctrinal justifications for certain rituals, symbols, saints, and liturgical traditions were actively forgotten and became less present in the consciousness of believers over time as a result of Soviet antireligious campaigns. By restricting the dissemination of religious knowledge, curtailing the number of clergy, and reducing access to sites formally designated as sacred by religious authorities, the Soviet state produced a public sphere that was visibly secular and where institutionalized religion had little presence. However, these efforts did not always correlate with a reduction in belief or appeals to otherworldly powers, however conceived.

Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1993) has argued that religion is, in essence, a particular mode of believing that functions as a chain of memory linking generations. "Breaking the chain of memory" by disrupting the

transmission of links between generations by halting shared ritual practice makes people "amnesiac," Hervieu-Léger claims. Speaking of Western European societies, she argues that the cultivation of religious "amnesia" was a key means by which these societies secularized. When ritual life is no longer collectively shared, religious practices cease to bind generations to one another. Belief fades into nonbelief, and religious proclivities transform into secular sensibilities. In many respects, a similar situation ensued in the USSR. Preventing the transmission of religious knowledge between generations prompted mass forgetting of formal religious knowledge and produced ignorance as religion receded from everyday lives, the public square and from the memories and consciousness of believers in Soviet society. Ignorance is not the same as nonbelief, but it does yield new dispositions, ethics, and identities just the same.

The production of ignorance concerning religion was complemented by a politics that insisted on fetishizing national affiliation and establishing a correlation between certain confessional and national groups united in opposition to an oppressive, unjust state. Whereas earlier generations suffered during World War II because they were targeted and victimized – and in turn targeted and victimized others – Western Ukrainians in the USSR felt themselves targeted and victimized again by another regime with different ideological justifications. Modes of self-identification in prewar Western Ukraine shifted from confessional allegiances and a sense of identity based on being "from here" (*tutshii*) to an identity in the Soviet period that increasing took on a national cast, albeit one that had a religious twin. As national identities were reaffirmed over time in opposition to a Soviet identity, so was the latent equation of religious and national identities as an organic and indissoluble whole. These emerging understandings of the self and its relation to a redefined collective informed the performance of death rituals by commemorating solidarity, connection, and belonging.

LIVED RELIGION

I consider the death rituals that individuals conducted in Soviet Western Ukraine to mark the passing of family and friends in a cultural context of victimization and state-sponsored secularism as a form of "lived religion." Such a conceptualization draws on the earlier work of Gabriel Le Bras (Desroche and Le Bras 1970), who wrote of "la religion vécue" and has been more recently expanded by Robert Orsi (1985, 1998), David Hall (1997), and others. The concept of "lived religion" constitutes a critique

of more familiar conceptualizations, such as "popular religion," "folk religion," "vernacular religion," and refers to the practices that emerge in the space between "official" religion and "pagan" culture.[5] The above-mentioned concepts are predicated on the idea that an oppositional tension exists between "official" religion and "unofficial" practices as well as between "religion," understood in a doctrinal and institutional sense, and "superstition," understood as beliefs in supernatural agents. In other words, "real religion" managed by an "elite" is conceptualized as something distinct from the magical practices of the masses.

Juxtaposing institutional religion and superstition automatically establishes an oppositional dynamic and a hierarchy that tends to dismiss the importance of the laity, their forms of agency, and the myriad ritual behaviors that guide individual everyday lives. This is manifest in historical studies of religion, which have consistently privileged institutional organizations over improvised practices. Given the religious landscape in the Soviet Union, it is even more imperative to consider extra-institutional forms of religious practice to more fully understand the religious life of a society governed by a state that proclaimed itself to be a promoter of atheism. The import of lived religion's twin in the USSR, secularism, is such that religious practices could even be characterized as "syncretically secular" (Wanner 2014: 435–436) Such was the extent to which popular as well as officially sanctioned religious aspects of death rituals were shaped by the possibilities for public expression in Soviet society.

Tamara Dragadze (1993) suggested that Soviet socialism "domesticated religion." Although this conceptualization avoids the binary opposition of "official" and "unofficial" religion, it suggests a taming of religion, which does not always apply to death rituals given the fears of volatile, untamable evil forces associated with them. It also suggests that the expression of religious sentiment and sacred appeals were driven into the home and the private sphere as the primary site of expression. Whether one speaks of processions or ceremonies that took place at cemeteries, there is a pronounced public and communal element to death rituals and burial practices. The same could be said of pilgrimages, confessions, and a host of other lifecycle rituals that have public and performative components. There is no escaping the fundamental Durkheimian insight that rituals are by their very nature social. They are shared events, which makes them inherently public. By virtue of the connections they offer to previous generations, which in this instance were increasingly conceived in national terms, these rituals were also profoundly communal events. "Domesticated

religion" does, however, capture the very gendered component of religious practice in multiple forms that emerged in the USSR, as elsewhere, over the course of the twentieth century, which explains why some defend the concept (Zumwalt et al. 2001).

Perhaps most importantly, lived religion prompts us to rethink what religion ultimately is and what it means to be religious. Lived religion mandates a more dynamic and fluid conceptualization of religious experiences that is tightly integrated with culture. This means that when considering religious practices as "lived religion" a host of other binary categories also break down: private and public, religion and materiality, mind and body, practice and text, sacred and profane, and sacralization and secularization. Such fixed, static categories, which permeate the study of religion, must be discarded if one is to think in terms of "lived religion." For as Robert Orsi has written, "People appropriate religious idioms as they need them, in response to particular circumstances. All religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed, and improvised at the intersection of life" (1997) In other words, individuals use their religion, its practices, symbols, rhythms, and palette of emotions, to forge meaning into their lives based on the circumstances they confront and their assessment of the possible responses they have at any given time and place. These responses constitute a form of authentic religious experience, however improvised, invented, and fleeting, that often has significant political implications.

Rather than dismissing the importance of lived religious phenomena because they are incapable of revealing universal or generalizable elements, I suggest that the insight they offer is one of reasserting the endless variety of religious experiences that key into tragedy and attempts to reckon with loss. Lived religious phenomena can be particularly insightful in the Soviet context, and in particular in a region that has been pummeled with violence and sweeping political and economic change because, to cite Orsi again, lived religion "tracks the explosive consequences for people, families, and political worlds at the juncture of intimate experience with political and social realities" (2003: 172) As a concept, lived religion skirts the need to forge coherence in analyses of social life and zeros in on the nature and import of human experience.

Thinking of religion, and in particular death rituals, in terms of how it was lived also offers the advantage of recognizing, and therefore incorporating into analysis, the degree of agency individuals have to outright create ritual practices or adapt received practices to local and historically specific

circumstances. It situates these practices within a particular socio-political context, offering consideration of how choices are structured and by whom. In doing so, it takes religion out of its denominational confines and expands the experiences recognized as religious, and the places and objects recognized as sacred, and contextualizes them within specific power relations.

A focus on lived religion challenges a rigid periodization that brackets off Soviet religious life as an anomaly that resists comparison to pre- and post-Soviet periods and to other areas of the world. It refuses the fundamental projection of difference that separates "them" from "us"; however, such a division is conceived. As such, archival research begins to approximate ethnography to a far greater degree. Historians are asked to "listen to the voices in the archive" and to acknowledge the impact of the actions, emotions, and beliefs of individuals to larger dynamics of change (Orsi 2003: 174). For both historians and anthropologists of lived religion, the border separating the familiar from the foreign begins to waver whether one makes comparisons over time or across cultures.

DEATH RITUALS AS LIVED RELIGION

Ritualized death practices blend Rudolph Otto's concept of the numinous, or inexplicable feelings of mystery and transcendence, and the ethical capacity Kant imparted to religion by articulating a moral order regulating social action among the living. The theological belief in the immortality of the soul combined with fears of the dead in the afterlife creates a multitude of lived religious practices, not only in Western Ukraine but across the Eastern Christian world as well, which were never sanctioned by the official church. I use the phrase ritualized death practices to note a series of rituals and ritualized behaviors that were embedded in everyday life, rather than a single transformative burial rite. In the postwar period, the rituals in Western Ukraine followed a tripartite pattern that included laying out the body, a public funeral procession, and a burial rite and communal meal.[6] A formal, religious service involving clergy usually constituted only a small part of the events, and it often did not take place in a church. Rather, it took place at the cemetery, which during the Soviet period emerged as something of a sacred site policed every bit as much as the churches were.

In spite of the fact that Orthodoxy, Greek Catholicism, and a host of other confessions present in Western Ukraine offer a message of hope at

the time of death conveyed by images of heavenly reward, redemption, and salvation, funerals were saturated with fears of the "unquiet dead." This fear was based on the conviction that interaction does not end with death. Rather, the deceased is now in a privileged position to positively and protectively influence the fate of the living. On the other hand, the recently departed can bring misfortune and suffering to those who have not properly repaid their debt to the deceased by honoring his or her memory. A degree of agency is projected on to the dead in anticipation of their assessment as to the extent of indebtedness the living has to them and the degree to which they have fulfilled their obligation to repay it. Death rituals become an event of heightened importance for the living to recognize these debts, honor them, and in the process terminate the possibility of the dead returning to seek vengeance upon the living for what is still owed to them.

Stanley Tambiah has written that "Ritual is not a 'free expression of emotions' but a disciplined rehearsal of 'right attitudes'" (1985: 134). In other words, even when rituals were relatively improvised, they were sites where moral order was displayed. Repeated over and over in scripted repetition, this moral order informed attitudes and dispositions. Rituals gain their power by presenting ideas and actions analogically with the intention of persuading practitioners to integrate their meanings. A ritualized dialogue with the dead in the form of laments expressed feelings of indebtedness and obligation. The acceptability of the ritual and the moral order it embodied hinged on the extent to which it was perceived by the community as having been performed correctly. By not following the moral norms of repaying indebtedness to the deceased with an appropriate death ritual, the living potentially courted the wrath of the deceased as well as the wrath of previous generations. The unquiet dead were thought to have the power to provoke misfortune in the form of disease, poor harvests, bad weather, and other calamities.

Most ritualized behaviors concerned with caring for and honoring the dead took place in the home and were usually performed by an even number of older female relatives or neighbors. The body of the deceased was washed and dressed, avoiding the color red. The body was placed on a bench under a window with the head facing icons and the feet aimed in the direction of the door. Old Believers, a conservative sect of Orthodoxy, on the other hand, placed the feet closer to the icon corner, reasoning that, if the dead faces the icons, he or she can pray. As long as the deceased remained in the house, all work ceased except for funeral preparations.

Ideally, the body stayed home for three days, but this was often not possible, especially in summer. More recently, if the body stays at home at all, it is only for one day.

Laments, perhaps more than any other aspect of the mortuary rite, vividly reflect the conviction that death is not the end of life. They are appeals to the dead to intervene and protect the living, further adding to the debt the living has to the dead. Through laments, requests are made to the deceased directly, imploring them to open their eyes, rise from the coffin, and respond. Although in the nineteenth century both men and women lamented, over the course of the twentieth century this changed. It became the moral obligation of the deceased's female relatives to lament. The community cast judgments on the extent, quality, and loudness of the laments. If lamenting was found deficient, relatives could be accused of not properly honoring their dead. Given the very small families that became increasingly common over time, wailers could be hired to compensate for the lack of relatives so that the tribute could be performed properly.

The goal of the mourning process was to direct the fate of the soul. Catholic purgatory was imagined as a mountain that must be climbed, much like the Orthodox idea of *mytarstva*, or spiritual trials. Older women read the Psalter, or prayers for the dearly departed, to assist the deceased in their journey through purgatory. A special prayer for permission to pass into heaven, called the *prokhidna* or *provodnichok*, was read as a testimony to the deceased's worthiness and good standing (Kononenko 2006: 51–54). Although this prayer of passage was meant to be read by a deacon or other official of the Church, during the Soviet period it was often read by one of the women who dressed the body and kept vigil. The prayer text was placed in the hands of the deceased and buried as well. Reading religious texts was a way to "Christianize" the moment and infuse it with institutionally crafted religious knowledge even though the home setting was clearly profane and the ritual leaders' main credentials were that they were female and related to the deceased.

The burial rite itself began with a service at home, usually held in the afternoon. Candles were burned and the small remaining pieces were placed in the coffin to light the way for the deceased. Other material objects, such as a favorite drink, cigarettes, money, or gifts for their children if they preceded them in death, were also placed in the coffin. This practice of giving savored material objects to the spirit of the deceased reaffirmed a vision of the anticipated life after death the spirit would

experience. This practice progressively dwindled as the conviction of life after death began to hold less sway. Therefore the "evidence" of it, in the form of beloved or useful objects, was no longer necessary.

In contrast to the mourning and lamenting done in an intimate home setting, the funeral procession constituted a very public aspect of death rituals. The order of who preceded whom in the procession was highly prescribed. The body was carried to the grave feet first, with the mourners following so that the deceased would not "see" them as they lamented or wailed. The procession was led by someone of the same gender as the deceased, who carried an icon draped with a *rushnyk*, or ornate hand-embroidered cloth, followed by women with funeral wreaths, and a young girl who threw flowers or flower petals. *Kolivo*, a porridge laced with honey, was carried in front of the coffin and later became the first course of the funeral meal. The coffin came next. It was carried by people of the same gender as the deceased. Immediately following the coffin was the priest, the closest relatives of the deceased, and then other relatives and friends. Anyone could join the procession, and many did, making every funeral procession an open, collective event (Fig. 3.2).

Fig. 3.2   Two examples of a *rushnyk*

In leaving the house, the coffin was tapped against the threshold three times, or simply lowered three times, for the deceased to bid farewell to his or her home. Even if the body was brought to the cemetery by truck, the coffin was still carried for some distance to create a processional atmosphere. Processions would stop at all crossroads, which were considered places of danger, so that the coffin could be lowered. If there were no crossroads along the way, the procession would stop three times anyway.

When the procession reached the cemetery, if possible, a church service would be held. The severe restrictions on clerical participation in lifecycle rituals meant that churches were closely monitored. Over time, cemeteries became the sites of appeals to the divine for intervention at the time of burial (Shlikhta 2011). The most important moment of the burial rite – and for which there was much anxiety about not having a priest during the Soviet era – was the sealing of the grave. The priest was charged with making the sign of the cross on the grave opening, and sometimes even on the four sides of the dug grave, to seal it to prevent the deceased from reemerging. If a priest could not be present on the day of the burial, he would seal the grave the day before or at the house on the day of the burial. In other words, at a minimum, the grave was at least symbolically sealed so as to reduce the potential threat the deceased might pose. After final laments were made at the graveside, the coffin was lowered into the grave using a special *rushnyk*, which was often laden with local folkloric symbols. These embroidered cloths were frequently given as gifts to those who helped with funeral preparations. These handcrafted material objects symbolized the close relationship of participants in the ritual process to the deceased. Relatives threw three handfuls of dirt before the coffin was entirely buried and afterwards the grave was decorated with flowers and a cross.

Of all the practices associated with death rituals, secular authorities were most adamant about stopping the practice of sealing the grave. It was understood as foundational, validating superstitious beliefs about the afterlife, the existence of ancestral spirits, and the presence of otherworldly supernatural powers. The authorities also objected to marking graves with crosses. As a result, family members hid crosses near the grave wrapped in a *rushnyk* or covered with black ribbons with messages on them.

After the procession, the participants, who took an alternate route back to the deceased's house, threw fir and juniper branches on the ground to cover their tracks so as to confuse evil spirits and prevent them from following. Once back at the house of the deceased, guests purified themselves by washing their hands, sometimes even three times, and touching

the stove before sitting down to dinner. Traditionally, the first dish offered was *kolivo*, a porridge sweetened with honey. Increasingly, cookies made with honey are served instead. So that the meal would begin and end with something sweet, *kisil'*, a thin fruit pudding, was served as the final course of the burial meal.

The day after the burial, the family returned to the grave to bring the deceased a meal that usually included bread, some of the food served the day before, and a glass of *horilka*, or vodka. If the meal went untouched, it was taken as confirmation that the deceased had departed this world. Subsequent visits to the grave were made on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after the death. The fortieth day was especially important because it was believed that the soul returned home at this time. A large commemorative meal was served with a place set for the deceased. After forty days of the soul wandering the Earth, it settled in either heaven or hell. Prayers prior to the fortieth day could positively influence the fate of the deceased and ultimately decide whether this journey to the afterlife would end with the dead becoming one of the ancestors or one of the unquiet dead destined to torment the living. At the one-year anniversary of the death, the family returned to the grave with a meal again. At this point, the deceased was now formally considered one of the ancestors.

The practice of offering meals at the gravesite marked time in very defined segments in relation to the moment of death. This practice also blends life with death by rendering the cemetery a domestic space, much like the home, where a family ordinarily eats and mourns the death in the first place. In addition, there were twelve special Saturdays throughout the year called *pominal'ni, bat'kivs'ki,* or *zadushni suboty* designated for praying for the souls of the dead, which served as an additional means of marking time in terms of death. Prayers were believed to be especially influential on these days. In rural areas, prayers of blind minstrels were considered especially effective because such minstrels were believed to be gifted mediators between the world of the living and dead (Kononenko 1998: 189–190).

Unbaptized children, unmarried youth, accidental deaths, murder victims, and, most acutely, cases of suicide, presented extra challenges. They were all considered "bad deaths" and as a result had extra prescriptions. People who do not die naturally do not rest in the afterlife and are more inclined to return. Usually they had no time to receive the sacraments, which only underlined the tragic nature of their deaths. Markers were placed to note the exact site of all sudden, violent, or "bad" death, from

roadside accidents to wartime massacres. Those who committed suicide were the most complicated of all because they were considered sinners for having gone against God's will. There were prescriptions against burying them in the cemetery because their presence could potentially anger the "clean" dead. Priests often refused to participate in the burial rite and to say the prayer of permission to establish their good standing in the after-life. Both the site of a suicide and the site of a suicide victim's burial were considered "unclean" places where the unquiet dead and other evil forces congregate and as a result were commonly marked by a pile of stones to keep the spirits away.

Conclusion

Death rituals alleviated the anxieties over the fate of the dead and their potential to become the unquiet dead. In this particular region, World War II yielded a multitude of tragic and unnatural deaths. Opportunities to properly honor and bury the dead were often limited or nonexistent. Under conditions of postwar Soviet state-enforced secularism, efforts to properly bury were hampered again, but for different ideological reasons. This fueled and even normalized the practice of conducting improvised, privatized burial rites. Such distinctive practices were firmly embedded in cultural identities that were initially perceived in local, and later national, terms that stood in opposition to a Soviet identity.

Another factor that promoted popular devotions to the dead was feelings of indebtedness to previous generations. Feelings of indebted-ness are, in essence, acts of remembrance. Devotions made manifest the experiential feelings of loss and grieving, which reinforced the links connecting generations that have lived in a certain place over time. Death rituals became a prime arena for shaping social relations because they effectively articulated the dynamics of remembering, forgetting, and setting straight the feelings of indebtedness and obligations among generations.

Indebtedness mandates action. The very disappearance of a person ushers forth a material representation of the very immateriality of the loss. At the time of death, remembrance and feelings of indebtedness fuse and the ritual becomes the last moment to make amends for debts. It is important to note that mourning can lead to positive forms of forgetting. The very act of forgetting is actually a desirable social goal because it allows the living to restore a certain social order and a sense of

continuity and stability after the passing of a community member. However, forgiveness of debts and forgetting is only possible when the deceased transitions out of the potentially perilous category of the "unquiet dead."

The goal of the death rituals described here was to ensure the salvation of the soul as a last act of reciprocal exchange between generations so as to placate the possible wrath of the deceased as a member of the unquiet dead. Proper ritualized mourning, albeit under highly constrained circumstances, could clear the indebtedness of the living to the dead with symbolic repayment. The entire process of death rituals, including burial, grieving, and mourning, generated fears that were predicated on the view that death was not an ending or a departure. Rather, it was the transformation of one form of existence into another. In Western Ukraine, fears about how the living would be affected by this new status a member of the community had assumed after death prompted an array of ritualized practices that were specifically geared to protect the family and community from the potential harm the deceased could inflict during a return to this world.

Soviet antireligious campaigns attempted to eradicate such fears and the rituals they prompted by limiting the presence of churches and clergy, especially from the Greek-Catholic Church. Moreover, the Soviet state sought to exclusively endorse secular forms of authority and scientifically grounded conceptions of agency and power that could be used to generate well-being through state-designed programs of social engineering. Yet, dissenting individuals responded to repressive measures by giving greater authority to the laity, usually women, for conducting death rituals and making greater use of the home, cemetery, and other created sacred spaces as sites of ritualized behavior to conduct death rituals when religious and public institutional sites were closed to them.

If concern over aspects of lived religion was one of the factors that threw the official churches into disagreement with the faithful, the prominence of lived religious practices, which were most vividly illustrated by death rituals, was a key factor that sustained religious proclivities and religious sensibilities during the Soviet period in spite of secularizing tendencies, atheist ideology, and antireligious campaigns. Even under such conditions, death rituals that drew on divine, transcendent, and supernatural forces endured precisely because they so effectively linked generations into a meaningful community predicated on shared suffering and reciprocal exchange. This quelled the potential wrath of the "unquiet dead" by addressing debt obligations between previous generations and the living. Having conceptualized the

"unquiet dead" and their powerful forms of agency, Western Ukrainians designed and redesigned death rituals, even under a variety of social and political circumstances, to appease them.

Notes

1. In addition to deaths induced by the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 and the Revolution of 1905, Mark Steinberg notes the plethora of everyday violence in early-twentieth-century Imperial Russia in the form of brutal crimes, executions, assassinations, and diseases. This contributed to a consensus that "human life had lost value." Steinberg, *Petersburg: Fin de Siècle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 147. See also Irene Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).
2. TsDAGO (Центральний державний архів громадських обєднань України [Central State Archives of Social Organizations of Ukraine]) f. 1, op. 24, str. 4263, ark. 227–230.
3. TsDAGO f. 1, op. 24, str. 4263, ark. 203–205. These priests were often accused of not strictly following Orthodox convention.
4. The Soviet government even pressed Metropolitan Sheptytsky of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church during World War II to use his moral authority in Galicia and beyond to quell inter-ethnic violence and restore order in the region. See Himka (2012).
5. Nineteenth-century ethnographers introduced the romantic concept of "folk religion" with their studies of peasant practices. Although there is much merit in these early works in terms of ethnographic detail, they tend to be ahistorical and bypass consideration of the relationship of lived religion to Orthodoxy and the socio-political context in which "folk religion" was practiced. For Ukraine, see Ivanov (1919).
6. Some of the best ethnographic analyses include Oksana Kis', *Zhinka v Traditsiinii Ukraïns'kii Kul'turi* (Lviv: Institute Narodoznavstva NAN Ukraine, 2006); Christine D. Worobec, "Death Ritual Among Russian and Ukrainian Peasants: Linkages between the Living and the Dead," in

Stephen P. Frank and Mark D. Steinberg, eds. *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices, and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); earlier valuable studies include Vovk, Kh, *Studiï z Ukraïns'koï Etnografiï ta Antropolohiï* (Prague, 1928); and Ilarion, *Metropolit Dokhristiians'ki, Viruvanniia Ukraïns'koho Narody* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Volyn', 1965).

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Life After Death/Life Before Death and Their Linkages: The United States, Japan, and China

Gordon Mathews and Miu Ying Kwong

THE SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

This chapter considers comparative senses of life after death in the United States, Japan, and China through ethnographic interviews in the three societies. We define "life after death" in the broadest possible way, as some aspect of experience, consciousness, or even influence that continues beyond one's earthly demise. This may involve a belief in heaven; it may involve a sense that something continues through reincarnation; it may involve a feeling that one's ancestors are watching over him or her; or it may involve a sense that some aspect of oneself will continue through one's artistic creations or one's children. Our major premise in this investigation is that senses of life after death are linked to how people think and live before death. The comparative investigation of senses of life after death in the United States, Japan, and China can thus tell us interesting things about these societies in this realm before death.

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Senses of life after death may seem an unpromising topic for social scientists to explore because for many people in the developed world, it is seen as a matter of unverifiable speculation. But if senses of life after death are firmly adhered to by a given population, then it is not a matter of airy speculation, but rather of social if not physical reality, and may profoundly influence attitudes and behaviors of people in this world. Consider Marx's dismissal of religion as "the opium of the people" (Tucker 1978, 54): because of the proletariat's belief in a paradisal "next world," Marx argued, this world's oppression is made tolerable, at least until they awaken from their false consciousness to revolt against their this-world oppressors. Or consider Weber's analysis of the Protestant Ethic (Weber [1920–21] 1958). For Calvinists, Weber maintained, a person's economic success was one of the few means by which one could ascertain that one might be among the chosen. However, if one enjoyed this wealth or spent it on luxuries of any kind, this would prove unworthiness for heaven. Thus Calvinists labored and reinvested, living out a joyless blueprint for the sake of their proof of salvation: a blueprint that led, according to Weber, to the eventual worldwide domination of capitalism, and our immersion in capitalism's "iron cage." By these analyses, beliefs in life after death have had profound consequences for attitudes and behavior in this world before death: belief in life after death has created the world we live in today.

Today, too, a sense of a world beyond may have a profound impact on the affairs of this world. Have some of Al-Qaeda's minions truly believed that 72 virgins await them in heaven, motivating them to die as terrorists? And did George W. Bush indeed speak with God before he authorized the invasion of Iraq? These may be the stuff of myth and propaganda, but senses of life after death remain overwhelmingly common in the world today. According to the World Values Survey, 64% of human beings the world over believe that there is life after death (Inglehart et al. 2004, 353). The use of the term "belief" in the World Values Survey seems problematic, in that it seems to assume that life after death is a matter of faith, as it may be in a Christian or Muslim context, rather than being a vaguer matter of a "feeling" of life after death, as it often is in a Japanese and Chinese context. (See Needham 1972 for a book-length demolition of anthropological assumptions concerning the universality of "belief.") In this chapter, we use the term "sense" of life after death in order to avoid the ethnocentric assumptions that may be apparent in a term such as "belief." In any case, it seems clear that senses of life after death are felt by a majority of the world's population. Despite this, however,

comparative senses of life after death in different societies are rarely studied by social scientists (see Walter 1996 and Nakasuji 2006 for analyses of senses in life after death around the world, among the few such books we know of).

The examination of senses of life after death is important because imaginings of the next world may be linked to thought and behavior in this world. As individuals, we create the larger social and institutional world that creates us, as practice theory (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Bourdieu 1977; Ortner 2006) has demonstrated. In his *Imaginary Social Worlds* (1984), a wonderful but neglected ethnography, John Caughey analyzes how individuals' fantasy interactions with media and other imagined figures reflect, and by implication, create real social worlds. He thus shows that even the most private of fantasies have social implications. This is true for beliefs about life after death as well. What people think about a world after death may be linked to how they live and shape their societies in the world before death: individual imaginings of life after death take place within, through, and against the various sociocultural forms of the societies in which people live.

In this chapter's ethnographic exploration of senses of life after death in Japan, the United States, and China, Mathews has ethnographically researched Japan and the United States, and Kwong has researched China. We might have also investigated Western Europe, some of whose societies are among the most secular on earth, with many people expressing no sense of life after death. Alternatively, we might have investigated societies in Africa or Asia, from Nigeria to Kenya to Pakistan, where an overwhelming majority of people express explicit belief in life after death in terms of Christianity or of Islam. But as we will demonstrate, these three societies, comprising the world's three largest economies, can give us similar yet contrasting readings of senses of life after death in ways that shed light on the nature of these societies.

We have done this investigation through ethnographic interviewing: we have chosen a small number of people to intensively interview about their lives in this world, and their senses, if any, of any world beyond this one. For this topic, statistical surveys are insufficient—rather than simply finding out what percentage of people adhere to a sense of life after death, we have sought to discover what a small number of people think in depth, supplementing this with scholarly and popular accounts of life after death in these societies. Through analysis of these interviews, we have sought to understand how personal senses of what may lie beyond the grave in the

United States, Japan, and China relate to how individuals understand their lives and their societies in this world.

What, for example, are the different ways in which a Christian's belief in heaven may impact her views of this world within these different societies? What kind of linkage, if any, can be found between a belief in reincarnation as the objective weighing of merit and trust in this-world meritocracy, such as the examination system for school admissions in China and Japan? What kind of linkage, if any, might exist between the sense that one's ancestors are watching over one and the idea that personal connections are a legitimate source of social capital? Or between a sense that one's immortality is to be found through the accomplishments of one's descendants and a familial emphasis on education? How might an individual's sense that "I will die but my country will live on forever," or "I will die but my name will endure," or "I will live on through my children and their descendants," or "I will return to nature when I die and become part of the cosmos" link to this person's political, social, and ecological views? What kind of linkages might be found between skepticism toward life after death and consumerism and "living for now"? To what extent might interviewees who express such skepticism also express a lack of patience for bad jobs or bad marriages, since "you only live once," and to what extent do they find alternative justifications for endurance, such as family reputation?

There are indeed various kinds of linkages to be found between senses of what may happen after death, and attitudes toward living in this world, as Mathews's previous research has demonstrated (1996, 2011). But these linkages are subtle and often indirect; we can only provide hints to the answers to these questions in the pages that follow. In this chapter, we present only the beginnings of this research, but we can provide at least a rough depiction of what this linkage looks like in three different societies.

LIFE AFTER DEATH, PAST AND PRESENT

First, let us provide a brief overview of senses of life after death. Today, what happens to us after we die, is for many people, a matter of speculation. As a Japanese interviewee put it, "Who knows what happens after we die? After all, no one's ever come back from there to tell us about it." But it appears that, with some notable exceptions, most societies in history have taken life after death for granted (Kastenbaum 2009) because there has been no reason to think otherwise, no reason to doubt that life after death exists.

For the past 1,500 years, senses of life after death have typically followed the teachings of the major world religions (Casey 2009), as well as ritual practices related to family, particularly in China and Japan (see Watson and Rawski 1988 on China, and Smith 1974 on Japan). Christianity and Islam have been directly concerned with life after death since this involves God's judgment as to the individual's salvation or damnation, but concern over life after death has been abundant in other cultural settings as well, such as those of China and Japan (Formanek and LaFleur 2004; Nakasuji 2006; Zheng 2008, 134–166). In China and Japan, multiple types of life after death have been imagined—reincarnation, hell, paradise, a realm of the ancestors—but even within the Christian world, there have been wide variations: the Catholic purgatory which Protestantism rejected, as well as a range of other formulations within different Christian and non-Christian sects, from the Quakers to the Mormons. But it seems readily apparent that concern and conjecture over life after death have been commonplace in all these different societies over their histories.

Widespread skepticism toward life after death is largely a modern phenomenon. It was only in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries that "non-belief" became a serious option for many Europeans and Americans (Baumer 1960; Turner 1986), an option that has spread throughout much of the developed world today, not least in East Asia. Social scientists in the mid-twentieth century widely assumed that the world as a whole was becoming secular, but this has not happened; on the contrary, numerous bestselling books in the United States, Japan, and China argue for the reality of life after death. More than secularization, what has happened throughout the developed world is that senses of life after death have become individuated and privatized, with people not following a standardized religious doctrine and envisioning instead their own particular versions of life after death.

It has been reported that 28% of American baby-boomers say they believe in reincarnation (Roof 1994, 72), with Americans "shopping for faith" (Cimino and Lattin 1998), while Christianity and its promise of heaven has become a major religion in China. Today, people throughout the developed world hold to an array of different senses as to what may happen after death, often far removed from the traditional religious orientations of their societies. As it has been written, in today's developed world, "to an immeasurably higher degree than in a traditional social order, the individual is left to his own devices in choosing... 'ultimate'

meanings" (Luckmann 1967, 98)—and senses of life after death (Genyū 2005). The ultimate fate of human beings has become a matter of individual speculation throughout much of the developed world, rather than of collective religious doctrine.

As noted earlier, there are different forms of immortality. Typically, senses of life after death involve the conviction that one's consciousness will indeed continue in some form after one's physical death. But these senses may range from a conviction based on religious doctrines, such as the beliefs held by some Christians, to a less certain cultural sense of life after death, such as that spoken of by some who practice ancestor veneration. Beyond this, many people find senses of life after death not in literal immortality but in symbolic immortality, through that which one leaves behind when one dies (Becker 1974; Lifton 1996). This can range from fame—"I will die but I will be remembered for what I have done"—to works of art that one has created, to larger entities that live on after one's death ("I will die so that my country can shine forever!"), to one's own children and descendants through which one continues. The pursuit of immortality is not only a matter of seeking an ongoing individual consciousness, but also can be a matter of seeking enduring influence over one's family and society through one's reputation beyond the grave. This may seem rather weak as a substitute for the continuation of consciousness, but in a skeptical age, this may be all that can be adhered to for many.

And of course, there are people for whom no life after death or influence beyond the grave is sought. Zuckerman (2008) discusses Denmark and Sweden as "societies without God," and without much belief in life after death—and certainly there are many people throughout the developed world who adhere to no sense of life after death, but simply believe that once you die, you're dead, and that's that. However, how many of us claiming to be complete unbelievers in any realm beyond death are in a subconscious sense pursuing symbolic immortality of some sort? For at least some people, even though we accept in a conscious sense that we will die and become nothing, subconsciously, we may long for more. And of course, while some people are complete non-believers in any life after death, many more are agnostics—"Maybe there's life after death, but maybe not. Who knows?" And while some of these people may devote no thought to what lies beyond the grave in this world, others—a surprisingly large number, our own research has revealed—may devote considerable thought to the matter, in trying to figure out what their lives may ultimately mean in a timespan transcending their own brief earthly existence.

All of these different views described above are apparent in the societies now to be examined: the United States, Japan, and China. This chapter is based on a range of interviews conducted in these societies over the past 25 years, and particularly over the past five years. Japanese and American interviews were first conducted by Mathews in 1989–1991, in the context of his research on what makes life worth living (Mathews 1996) and then more recently, on the topic of life after death itself. Interviewees were asked about their views of life after death, and also about the narrative of their lives, so that conjunctions and disjunctions between these two realms could be figured out and analyzed. Chinese interviews have been conducted by students from the class "Meanings of Life" at the Chinese University of Hong Kong over the past five years. In addition to this, Kwong has conducted interviews with Chinese people over the past year as part of her M. Phil. research at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. We have conducted a total of 231 interviews: 98 Japanese interviews, 82 American interviews, and 51 Chinese interviews. Interviewees come from an array of different social class backgrounds, religious backgrounds, and stages of the life course in the three societies; interviewees ranged from 19 to 92, and were evenly divided between men and women. American interviews were conducted in the Denver area, Japanese interviews were conducted in the Sapporo area, and Chinese interviews were conducted in the Guangdong area, with a few mainland Chinese interviewed in Hong Kong as well. These cities have their own particular characteristics—had we done our interviews in Boston, Kyoto, and Beijing, we probably would have had a slightly different spectrum of senses of life after death or its lack—but we do not think these differences would be sufficient to invalidate our three societal depictions.

In this chapter, we do not have the space to analyze individual interviews; this, we anticipate, will be the subject of a later book. But we can offer excerpts of these interviews, along with scholarly and popular sources of information, to offer a broad profile of the United States, Japan, and China in turn as to life after death. Because our sample of interviewees is limited in size, the interpretive profiles we offer are necessarily somewhat arbitrary. In all these societies there exists a multiplicity of interpretive options available for thought and action, and individuals can construct or select a specific one, and can make use of alternative options in different contexts or different life circumstances. We have explored, based on what our interviewees in three societies have told us, a number of these different options, and offered, on this empirical basis, three comparative societal interpretations. What we offer in this chapter is by no means the final

word, but rather an initial interpretive attempt, one that will be reworked and redefined as we continue to collect data.

THE UNITED STATES

A key fact to remember about the United States in the context of life after death is that it is an outlier among developed world countries in maintaining powerful religious beliefs and widespread agreement as to the existence of life after death. Over 90% of Americans claim to believe in God (Gallup 2011), and 81% of Americans say they believe in life after death (Inglehart et al. 2004, 353) higher figures than can be found in almost any other developed country in the world.[1] These statistics are questionable as to their ultimate validity—some Americans may claim to believe in God and life after death because they think that such beliefs are socially desirable, just as they may also claim to attend church more than they actually do (Paulson 2014). Nonetheless, while these figures are probably exaggerated to some degree, they do reflect the basic fact that, as noted earlier, in the United States, senses of life after death are more prevalent than elsewhere in the developed world.

A large proportion of these believers—roughly three out of four Americans—say that they believe in the promise of immortality offered by the Christian God. As a policeman in his thirties said, "Did Jesus in fact rise from the dead? Is death conquered? Or is death the final say?...If there was no life after death, then all would be futile. You'd do whatever good you could do in this realm, but what would be the use? The promise of eternal life, of salvation through Christ—that's what it's all about" (Mathews 1996, 176). What this eternal life in heaven actually consisted of was difficult to answer for most of those interviewed. As a Christian real estate agent in her twenties said, "I don't believe heaven is really streets of gold. Each person has a different heaven." As a Christian minister in his fifties said, "God is love, and heaven is where God's love can be experienced completely and eternally." A range of popular films in recent decades have provided a cavalcade of images and ideas through which heaven might be envisioned. But heaven remains problematic in imagination for at least some because of its apparent stasis—as the rock band The Talking Heads irreverently sang in the 1980s, "heaven is a place where nothing ever happens." Nonetheless, heaven, however difficult to conceive of, is vigorously imagined and dreamed of by many millions of Americans (see Miller 2011, 2014).

Other interviewees, many of whom were raised as children in Christian households, have rejected organized religion but continue to hold at least partially to the idea of life after death. A businessperson in his sixties said, "I was religious as a child, and then I went away from it during the hectic years of my career. I'm starting to come back to it. I think there's some kind of immortal soul that goes on beyond us. The commonality of near-death experiences—I think that there's a fifty percent chance, anyway, that that describes something that's real." An engineer in her twenties said, "I used to be religious; my parents made sure that we went to Sunday school. But I began to not believe in religion when I became aware in college of the prejudices against women in organized religion. That doesn't mean that I don't believe in an afterlife; I think there's an eighty percent chance that my existence will continue after death."[2] A musician in his thirties said,

> I believe in God, but I don't go to church. I know that there is a God; I think He's the same for Christianity, for Judaism, for Muslems, for Buddhists. I don't believe in organized religion—I think it's a crock. If I died right now, I'd go to a life after death, I'm a hundred percent sure— unless I've been such a horrible person that I'm not allowed to do that. But think I'm a good person at heart.

There are numerous bestselling books in the United States that describe life after death through the lens and justification of science (e.g., Alexander 2012; Moody and Kubler-Ross 2001), making life after death seem rationally plausible, as it is to the three interviewees above. But it also seems remarkable the extent to which these assertions of belief implicitly remain under the influence of the Judeo-Christian God. Many of the people we interviewed went from a Christian or Jewish upbringing to a post-Judeo-Christian belief in different forms of life after death, sometimes saying that they have moved from being "religious" to being "spiritual." However, their apparent desire to believe in life after death may itself be a holdover of their childhood upbringings within a Judeo-Christian tradition.

We also interviewed several Buddhists, and people who described themselves as "New Age" or as "on my own spiritual path"; these people generally rejected Christian doctrines of heaven, with some speaking instead of reincarnation as their fate, although the extent to which they felt that reincarnation would really happen to them very much differed from person to person. Other interviewees could best be described as atheists, finding belief in God and heaven preposterous. A retired psychologist in his sixties said, "I think

religion is a projection of the superego, it's an illusion. I can't believe that even clergymen believe in it, although some must. This earth is the only go-round we have. Let's make this life the best possible life we can." A retired surgeon in his fifties said, "Is believing in God any different from believing in the tooth fairy? Not at all. The only thing is, it's socially acceptable to believe in God, and it's not socially acceptable to believe in the tooth fairy! That's my honest opinion, but I wouldn't espouse that belief to my brother, who is an Episcopal priest!" This view (also reflected in bestsellers such as those of Dawkins 2008; Hitchins 2009; Harris 2014) reveals a perplexity that so many people believe in a deity promising eternal life, a deity that for some may be their deepest friend in the world, but that others cannot imagine. The skeptics we interviewed sometimes felt frustration over the views of the people around them, they said; but given the social world they live in—several atheist interviewees had spouses who were believers in forms of Judeo-Christianity—they must practice restraint in expressing their views if they want to avoid damaging their relationships. As the retired surgeon said, "No, my wife and I don't argue about religion! Our marriage is too important for that."

Some of the non-believers in life after death had an obvious symbolic realm of immortality in which they had invested their hopes. A researcher in his sixties said that for him, science and the experimental method were the only pathways to truth; he felt that his own scientific research, his own "small contribution to human knowledge," might be seen as significant in eras after his death. A teacher in her forties, who like the scientist did not believe in any life after death, spoke of her children as genetically continuing her life. These non-believers portrayed themselves as thorough rationalists, leaving little room in their conceptualizations for the possibility of life after death beyond the rational realm.

The full relation of life after death to life before death for the American interviewees, as with those in Japan and China, was difficult to establish because we met many of them in a single interview and could not observe and talk with them over the course of their lives. However, within the constraints of interviews, we could see correlations between how people envisioned the next world and how they claimed to live their lives in this one. This was most clearly the case for Christians, who felt that their behavior on earth would determine their fate in heaven. All the devout Christians we spoke with felt that God was always present, and thus that their thoughts and behavior in this world had ramifications for the next world. Many of these Christians felt that moral order comes from the

Bible, and that without God's judgment, immorality would reign. As a retired teacher in her seventies said, "Without my belief in God, I wouldn't have worked so hard to create a good, moral life. That's true for other people too. The promise of heaven makes people good." For non-believers, there was no other world, and thus no link between this world and such a realm. But several people offered a rationalistic explication for social order, one that they themselves can adhere to but that others may not. As a professor in his sixties said, "I think that I have developed a system of ethics in my life which is kind of exemplary, and I'm not sure that everybody is capable of doing that without some help or guidance. I think that religion helps people to develop that sense of guidance." This is the view that religion, in its promise of life after death, is a moral crutch, one that these rationalists hope that most people, if not they themselves, will adhere to.

For those who held more ambivalent beliefs, those in the middle who felt there was some percentage chance that life after death existed, the linkage between life before death and life after death was more difficult to ascertain: life after death was neither something they totally affirmed and thus lived their lives by, or totally denied, thus living their lives in a humanistic moral structure of their own devising. It was rather something that might or might not happen, and thus at a remove from this world's deliberations. In this sense, both the believers and the atheists among interviewees still tended to live within the logic of the Judeo-Christian world of life after death, requiring many of them to seek to justify their lives and behavior in this world before death. It was the agnostics who seemed most free of such need: for them, the world after death, if any might exist, had little impact on this world before death. Thomas Henry Huxley, the nineteenth-century humanist who coined the term "agnostic," meant by it the doctrine of "not knowing": not knowing whether or not God, or in our context life after death, exist (Huxley [1892] 1978). For many of the agnostics we interviewed, the definition might be expanded to also incorporate "not caring." Of course some agnostics located themselves close to the religious pole ("Well, I think I believe, but I just don't know") while others located themselves close to the atheist pole. But a significant number of agnostics—particularly those between their twenties and their forties, in the prime of their lives and careers—devoted very little thought to any world beyond this one. As one airline pilot is his early fifties said, "Do I believe in God? I guess so. I don't know . . . Somehow I think my belief is in an inner spirit that you provide

lodging. But whatever continues after death, I don't think it's *you*. . . . But damned if I know. How should I know all this"? (Mathews 1996, 86). He thus seemed to adhere to something like reincarnation; but more important, in this context, is that he, like a number of other Americans we interviewed, seemed to have devoted little thought to the matter: this world was what was essential to him, not any other.

The United States, like the other two societies we are discussing, is a vast place, and multiple interpretations of its senses of life after death are possible. But at least within our own limited pool of interviews and readings, we were struck by the ongoing Judeo-Christian influence in interpretations of life after death, and their implications for how one should live in this world. It seems possible that the agnostics, rather than the atheists, may be the forerunners of a different American society, where life after death and the societal morality it commands no longer matter much; but judging from interviews, this is not yet what we see.

JAPAN

If the United States may be defined in part through the ongoing influence of the Christian religion, Japan, where 51% of people say they believe in life after death, according to the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al. 2004, 353), may be defined in terms of its great diversity in beliefs in life after death (Mathews 2011). There has always been a considerable degree of variation in Japanese senses of what lies beyond the grave (Formanek and LaFleur 2004), with some anticipating reincarnation—the transmigration of humans into different levels of existence upon death, from gods to animals to "hungry ghosts," (LaFleur 1983, 27)—and others the promise of Buddhist paradise attainable upon death (Amstutz 2004), and still others a realm of ancestors (Smith 1974)—and some, historically and today as well, embracing several of the above, indicating a flexibility in personal views (Mathews 2011, 370). One reason for such variation is that because Japanese religion has been based more on practice than on creed (Reader 1991, 1–22), individuals have been to some extent left free to imagine what they will. (Indeed, the statistics cited above are questionable in the Japanese context, where what people practice in their lives seems more important than what people profess to believe.) In any case, it seems that this proliferation of senses of life after death has exploded in the present era. As one recent popular Japanese primer has it, "As for . . . 'life

after death,' if you ask a hundred people you'll have a hundred different interpretations" (Inoue 2007, 74).

Some interviewees firmly adhered to ancestor veneration as the basis for their sense of life beyond the grave. A housewife in her eighties said, "I pray to the ancestors, and when something bad is happening, always someone has come to help me. After I die, I'll protect this family. I'll come and help, just as my ancestors have helped me" (Mathews 2011, 370). This is a traditional concept of ancestor veneration; a more contemporary version is based on feeling, with these two concepts sometimes overlapping in different individual accounts. A housewife in her fifties said, "After my mother died, I begin to feel that maybe I could see her again .... Human beings are too wonderful to disappear .... There must be something more" (Mathews 2011, 371).[3] Among the elderly, ancestor veneration is a matter of "commitment to family and forebears," but among the middle-aged, it was often more a matter of longing to meet again loved ones vanished from this world. For some we interviewed, ancestor veneration was a matter of a clear sense of the existence of the ancestors, but for others it was a cultural practice only. As a corporate employee in his forties said, "Every summer we visit [my father's] grave. I talk to him: 'Dad, how are you doing? Are you OK?' I don't think he's OK—he's dead!" (Mathews 1996, 86); he is in no realm of the ancestors, but only vanished, nothing.

Those who adhere to reincarnation follow a more individualistic path (although few think of it this way), since it is up to the individual to earn enough merit to be reincarnated in a higher rather than a lower state. This was also the case for those who felt that heaven or hell awaited them after death. A social worker in her forties said, "I do think there is a world of life after death, something like heaven and hell. I think I have an 80 percent chance of going to heaven. But I've had bad, selfish feelings too sometimes, so maybe there's a 20 percent chance of going to hell." An owner of a restaurant in her fifties said, "Probably if I died now, I'd go somewhere between salvation and hell, because I've just started praying to Amida Buddha. I don't feel I'll have to go to the deepest part of hell—I think I've been saved from that." A company worker in his twenties said, "Some people are born rich, others poor. It's unfair; that's why I believe in reincarnation" (quotations taken from Mathews 2011, 372–373). All of these people believe that the help of family or ancestors means nothing in determining their destination after death—rather, they will be weighed on the basis of their own merits as individuals, a judgment somewhat parallel to how some Americans think of heaven, as we saw in the last section.

There are also those who, often more playfully than those adhering to salvation, reincarnation, or ancestor veneration, discuss how they have been influenced by mass media to use their imaginations to envision a realm of spirits after death. A corporate employee in his twenties said, "I believe fifty percent in life after death. I think that maybe the soul is more than just energy. I wonder if there's a possibility that we're reborn as aliens on a different planet?" He spoke of the TV programs and movies and books he had read about possible life after death in other universes, or in other dimensions. Like the United States, in Japan, there is an extensive mass-mediated imagination of the beyond, providing individuals with raw materials for their own conceptualizations of a realm beyond the grave, and this is readily used, particularly by those we interviewed in their twenties and thirties, who cited a range of popular references from *manga* to movies to websites as shaping their senses of the beyond.

About a quarter of those interviewed were fairly certain there was nothing beyond the grave, a number higher than in the American context. A government worker in his fifties (quoted in Mathews 2011, 376) said, "I respect rituals like funerals, but I don't think there's any life after death . . . . When I die, I'll vanish. I don't feel sad; there's nothing I can do about it." A corporate employee in her thirties brought in an existential sense to this: "After I die, almost nobody will remember that I'd ever lived; after three years I'll be forgotten. That moment when I recognize my own existence is all I'll have. I guess you could say I live for self-consciousness. I want to die knowing for myself that I lived well. That's enough for me." Among those who did not envision an overt life after death, a number imagined a symbolic immortality. A designer in his thirties said, "Yes, I want everyone to look at my work after I'm gone and say, 'Nakamura did that!'" A mother in her forties told me, "I will die eventually, but my children will live on, and then their children and their children. So I will live on." A teacher in his thirties (quoted in Mathews 2011, 376) said, "When I die, I return to nature. I become part of the soil and air and water, and serve other life in its growth"—nature as the ultimate form of symbolic immortality. This is symbolic rather than literal immortality in the sense that one's consciousness does not actually continue—it is an immortality of the imagination rather than of anticipated experience—but nonetheless it is real enough. Parents indeed continue genetically through children and descendants; beyond this, we all return to nature as the elements contained in our flesh and bones. (See Boret 2014 for more on ecological immortality in Japan.)

The relation of the envisioned other world to life in this world among interviewees was most obvious among those who envisioned reincarnation or heaven/hell. These two afterlife realms are quite different in their historical background as well as their personal implications—is one's fate to be in heaven with God, or to be reborn as a human being?—but bear in common the sense that for those who adhere, their behavior and thoughts in this world determine their fate beyond this world. As a believer in reincarnation in her twenties exclaimed, "I believe that if you do bad things in this life, you'll suffer from the same pain that you inflicted upon others once you're reborn . . . I want to be reborn a human again, I don't want to be a cockroach!" People such as these, if their words are to be followed in all their implications, live in a world in which they are being judged as to their place in the next world. Those who adhered to ancestor veneration also sometimes spoke in moral terms. A laborer in his fifties said, "I worship my ancestors because I respect my Yoshida family; I believe my children and their children will do the same for me after I die . . . . I tell my kids that through all the generations no bad person's ever been born into this family, and so they too can't do bad things!" For the agnostics and non-believers, there was much less of a link between this world and any imagined next world. As a corporate employee in his thirties said, echoing Marx, "Religions teach that there's heaven and hell. Religions use these stories in order to teach people that we have to do good. But I think that when we die, everything just ceases." Nonetheless, the corporate employee we saw earlier who lives for self-consciousness in her final moments, as well as the teacher who saw himself as merging with nature, did indeed link their lives in this world to a larger purpose, even if it may have had little obvious linkage to how they behave in this world.

As compared to the Americans, Japanese interviewees were on average less willing to express a conviction as to the existence of life after death and adhered to a broader range of possibilities as to life after death. Japan's plethora of options for belief in life after death reflects the fact that this is largely a private matter, about which other people have little sway. Whereas many of the Americans spoke of the need for moral order in society provided by religion, only a few of the Japanese spoke this way. Japan's social and institutional structures are well-known for their intrusiveness into individual lives, as compared to many other societies, and the Japanese interviewees often spoke of the great social pressure they have felt to behave in accordance with other people's expectations. But this did not extend to their beliefs in life after death. If a world beyond death is viewed

by some Americans as a way to keep people behaving properly in this world before death, it is for some Japanese a world of individual freedom where this world before death in all its social pressures cannot reach. This certainly is not always the case—among those we interviewed were those who felt that their ancestors served as a powerful moral force in watching over them, as we have seen, and some viewed reincarnation in a similar way—but was very often true, more in Japan than in the United States or China. Many of the Japanese we interviewed felt that they more or less had to behave properly as company workers, housewives, students—they felt the pressures of the society around them judging them as to their behavior. But this was not true in the world beyond the grave. Japanese social restrictions in this world lead some Japanese to project a lack of such restrictions onto another world, one that is free for them to dream of in any way they like.

CHINA

Unlike Japan and the United States, there are no statistics available as to what percentage of Chinese believe in a realm beyond the grave; the percentage is probably smaller than in the United States, and probably than in Japan as well. Senses of life after death in China must be understood against the background of the rise and fall of the ideal of a communist utopia: a projected this-world paradise for a time supplanting the need for any other-world paradise.

Historically, China has had an array of beliefs about life after death (Wolf 1974; Cohen 1988; Zhang 1996; Jin 1999). However, from the 1950s to the 1970s, communism became in China a secular faith that sought to replace other forms of faith (see Liang 2014). On the authoritative basis of Mao's *Little Red Book* and celebrated stories like that of Lei Feng (Ebrey 1993, 442–446), the communist government erected a powerful ideology of self-sacrifice for the common good. Many interviewees, when recalling the socialist era, extolled the kindness of people at that time: "When we slept at night, we did not need to lock the door. No one ever stole anything. One reason was that there was nothing to steal. But the other reason is that people were so innocent and pure-minded in those days," a government worker in her fifties said. As Yang argued (1967, 385), communist ideology, like religion, had a certitude based on the promise of "posterity"—a future communist utopia that could serve as a secular parallel to life after death. This utopian ideal was so powerful that, as the

woman quoted above recalled, "At that time, we believed deeply that people in the whole world, except Chinese, were suffering. And we needed to liberate the world from its disastrous condition!"

The education of this era emphasized the supremacy of science and celebrated the liberation of workers, especially females, from superstition (Yang 1967, 389). The socialist era created a generation of atheists. In our interviews, people born between the 1940s and the early 1960s seemed most influenced by state-promoted atheism. An artist in his early fifties asked, "Soul? What is man made of? It's cells! Where is the soul? Religious teachings are all created and manipulated for political purposes." A retired accountant in her fifties explained, "Over the years I have seen the deaths of so many people. Once they are cremated, there's nothing left. What's left is your photos and the things you've used. That's all." A woman in her sixties recalled how she was taught about atheism: "When we were in primary school, we had a class called 'natural studies.' Our teacher would explain to us, for example, how thunder occurs. In the past, the elderly always said it was retribution for people who did bad things. Our teacher would say 'No, no. That's not the case.' Small kids were afraid of ghosts. Our teacher told us not to be afraid, because there were no ghosts." Rituals of ancestor veneration were reformed in this era to eliminate supernatural elements (see Jankowiak 1993, 258–300). During the Cultural Revolution, anti-religion policies accelerated, and all religious acts were banned—the only faith one should have was in communist ideology.

Nonetheless, the influence of this ideology could only extend so far. Some born in the socialist era continued to have a sense of an afterlife, thinking that there might be reincarnation or continued existence of the spirit after death. Even those who felt heavily influenced by atheism expressed uncertainty when it came to the topic of ghosts. Some revealed multiple senses of life after death: they thought that there was nothing after death, but at the same time said that they talked to the deceased at their graves and continued to feel that their ancestors would bless them and their children. Like some of the Japanese discussed in the last section, and a few of the Americans we interviewed as well, they had multiple frames through which to envision life after death, frames that they felt no necessity to make logically congruent.

Since the reform era began in the late 1970s, senses of life after death have reemerged and become increasingly widespread in China. Compared to those in their fifties and sixties, more interviewees in their thirties and forties revealed a sense of an afterlife, most often

reincarnation, which some described hearing about from their elders when they were young. A number of recent popular books in China explain reincarnation in Buddhist terms (Chen 2012; Xue Mo 2012; Khenpo Sodargye 2014). Many interviewees were inclined to think that spirits continue to exist after death. Some reported seeing their deceased family in dreams, perhaps having been influenced by movies and TV programs. For other interviewees, although their early atheist education left their imagination of the afterlife blank, they acquired a sense of life after death in the years since, whether in China or overseas. A businesswoman in her late forties said, "When I was young, people around me were atheists. I started reading about the afterlife when I was in my twenties, when I went to Canada for university, and learned about religion." While she was not affiliated with any religion, she held that if one misbehaves in this life, one will be reincarnated in a lower state in the next life or be sent to hell. Others of this generation have turned to Christianity, while still others have resisted any senses of life after death. An accountant in her fifties explained, "By the time I knew about religion, I was already in my thirties. How could I get rid of things I had learned earlier in my life? Now when I hear, for example, about Christian teachings, I think they're amusing."

Many people we interviewed looked for symbolic immortality. An artist in his fifties, quoted above, said, "I want to leave my name in art history. I want my paintings to be appreciated and studied in the future." A teacher in her sixties said, "When I die, my students may tell their children or even grandchildren that I was a good teacher. That's enough for me." A businessman in his fifties sought to spread traditional virtue in response to the moral decline he saw in China and the loss of trust among his fellows: "If people think about me after I die and say, 'Oh, Mr. Chan was a good guy!', then I will have succeeded. I will have established a standard people can follow." A company worker in his fifties said, "I am just an ordinary person. But I can pass the virtue of an ordinary person to my son—to be hardworking and contribute quietly to society." Several others also talked about how they hope their children could learn to be good people from their merits. For these people, being remembered or being able to pass on something to the next generation after they die seems more important than whether there is a life beyond this one. From these examples, we can see how in China, as to an extent in Japan, symbolic immortality takes on an importance for many people that may be less common in the

United States: these Chinese interviewees are saying, "Live for society and be fulfilled." It is also clear how some people's sense of ultimate meaning is tied to rebuilding the social order in China.

Many of the Chinese interviewees, including many atheists, expressed a longing for an afterlife. A few comments appeared repeatedly, such as "With atheism, Chinese now lack a sense of fear. They will do anything" and "Society will become more harmonious if people believe in reincarnation or heaven and hell. People now are so anxious. Money has become too important." A number of interviewees suggested that if more people in China had beliefs in an afterlife such as reincarnation or heaven and hell, China would be more peaceful, and immoral behavior such as corruption could be reduced. The longing for religion and after-life can be understood as a response to the moral loss caused by the fall of the idea of communist utopia: that moral order lost its legitimacy in the Cultural Revolution, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and nothing as powerful has replaced it, although one's family and its well-being remains salient as a justification for how one should live in contemporary China, at least judging from our interviews. One repeatedly hears dis-courses from the media about the ruthless pursuit of money in contem-porary China and how the country's moral standard has been falling; these were sometimes echoed in interviews. A businessman in his fifties said, "Every society needs a faith. Pursuit of money is the strongest faith in China now." Belief in an afterlife becomes a means through which people imagine a better China, one that is morally regulated as today many believe that it is not.

Even if many interviewees commented that China would be a better place if more people held karmic reincarnation or heaven and hell to be true, they nonetheless expressed confidence that they would behave morally even if there was no karma, no reincarnation, no heaven or hell. The basis for morality, in China, as in Japan more than in the United States, may lie in family and society, even if interviewees typically saw morality in China as in decline. Indeed, very few inter-viewees expressed fear of going to hell or being reincarnated as ani-mals. A business woman in her forties is one of the rare examples of such fear. She said, "I believe in karma. So far I haven't harmed anyone, I don't think. But I'm worried about this. If you do some-thing bad today, you never know when retribution comes. It may come only after you die." A few others who found senses of life after death in reincarnation tended to see reincarnation as a possibility of a

better future. A devoted Buddhist in her sixties said, "I don't want to be reincarnated in the next life. I want to go to paradise; I want to follow Buddha. Being human is bitter. I will not leave any money to my children when I die. I will spend all the money on Buddhist scriptures and donations."

To still others who thought there might be some kind of afterlife, senses of life after death concerned more a positive attitude in life than morality. Life after death was a comforting idea that made them less fearful of death, their own and those of significant others. A freelance writer in her forties said, "I believe my father and my friend will come to meet me after I die, so I'm not afraid of death anymore." Some who felt there was an afterlife could not explain why in any specificity; as a retired nurse in her fifties said, "I don't know why, but it brings me something to look forward to; it's better than having nothing. It makes me feel more positive about life." The relationship between life before death and life after death is less obvious among atheists and agnostics. One common attitude they seemed to hold was that since one only lives once, one should live life to the fullest: "Live happily every day, and do what you want to do as long as you don't harm others."

In China, the communist government created a powerful secular ideology in the 1950s and 1960s, replacing various religious strands as the basis for society's moral order, and promising the symbolic immortality of a coming Chinese utopia. The socialist era created a generation in which many are atheists who believe in nothing after death. That moral order lost its legitimacy in the Cultural Revolution without another order to replace it. Indeed, many Chinese feel that money and materialism have become overt and ruthless in contemporary China. There is a popular discourse that China has become morally corrupt because China has been atheist. As discussed earlier, the dominant basis of morality in China is probably not reward and punishment after death. Yet some Chinese do imagine a better China in which people are morally regulated by senses of life after death such as reincarnation or heaven and hell. Senses of an afterlife provide a possibility through which people can imagine a better China. The growing importance and varieties of senses of life after death in China must be understood against the background of moral loss and its shadow: the promise of a communist world of love and equality that has become instead an all-too-human world of corruption and the pursuit of wealth.

LIFE AFTER DEATH/LIFE BEFORE DEATH AND THEIR LINKAGES

We have briefly examined how the people we interviewed in the United States, Japan, and China have three somewhat different takes on life after death. But before discussing these differences, allow us briefly to explore the relation between senses of life after death and life as lived in this world before death.

On an individual level, some interviews from these three societies do indeed reveal a strong linkage between a sense of life after death, and attitudes toward life in this world before death but many more do not. The clearest distinction is this: the more religious or spiritually inclined a person we interviewed from one of these societies was, the more obvious the linkage between their envisioned life after death and their life before death; the less overtly religious or spiritually inclined a person was, the less obvious the linkage. A person who professed deep belief in the Christian God, a sense of reincarnation as reality, a profound feeling of commitment to one's family and descendants, or even a deep sense that although there is no life after death, the world would be better if people behave in a moral way, might tell a life story revolving around these beliefs, senses, or commitments. On the other hand, a person whose sense of life after death was more playful and tentative—"I don't know what happens after we die. Who knows!"—was likely to tell a life story bearing little or no relation to any sense of life after death. This is because we strive to make our personal narratives consistent. Whether these narratives reflect actual behavior in the world is an open question, but at least in terms of their narratives, these links are clearly found.

In the analyses of the preceding pages, there is a broad similarity between the United States, Japan, and China, in that in all three societies, some people are strongly motivated by senses of life after death, whether in terms of heaven and hell or reincarnation, while others find a sense of the meaning of their lives through symbolic immortality, whether through one's children, or through the example of one's behavior, or through one's accomplishments or creations, while others give no thought to any kind of immortality at all. There are also significant differences between these societies. Perhaps most important is that while for the majority of Americans the Christian God and promise of heaven are apparently quite real, for the majority of Japanese and Chinese, there is no such overwhelmingly real afterlife—although a minority do firmly believe in

reincarnation or other forms of life after death. Thus in the absence of any compelling image of a realm beyond this one, in Japan and China, symbolic immortality in this world takes on a larger importance. Somewhat unlike the United States, in Japan and China, a world beyond this one may be dreamt of or longed for, but it is *this* world which is more real for most: and this shapes how many people imagine the significance of their lives.

Let us consider each society in turn. In the United States, as reflected in our interviews, senses of life after death remain powerfully shaped by belief in the Christian God, although multitudes of other beliefs are also found. One reason for the salience of God and the promise of heaven may be that in the United States, social and institutional pressures to live in certain ways remain comparatively muted in some respects: the promise of heaven and salvation causes one to seek to live in a morally "good" way, since social and institutional pressures may not of themselves be enough to cause one to live this way. This is not to say that there aren't extensive pressures to live in accordance with the parameters of social class, educational level, ethnicity, and gender in the United States, but only to argue that these social pressures may often be comparatively less than in Japan and China, where social pressure (in Japan) and political pressure (in China) may be paramount. The fact this promise may not work well in leading to morally "good" behavior (as is widely noted, U.S. states with the highest church attendance also tend to have higher than average crime and murder rates: see, e.g., Chapman 1999) is beside the point.[4] The point is simply that the promise or hope of life after death through God's salvation may address a need that social pressure and education may not fully address for some: why lead a morally "good" life? Educated American rationalists have their own answers, as we saw—"the world will be better if we all lead morally upright lives"—but for many, that may seem like thin elitist gruel. God and the promise of the next world give, for better or for worse, many Americans moral guidance as to how to live in this world.

In Japan, as reflected in our interviews, moral guidance is also given by some beliefs in life after death—"the ancestors are watching over me, so I had better behave in a way that they will be proud of me"; "have I earned the right to be reborn as a human being in the next life?" But for the most part such guidance is provided so intently by social institutions and the social pressures of other people that senses of life after death are supererogatory as guidance. Just as American spiritual guidance may be of limited effectiveness, so too Japanese societal pressure: at least some of the massive numbers of NEETs, *hikikomori, parasaito shinguru*, and so

on, are choosing to drop out from the conventional postwar Japanese social order and its pressures.[5] But most Japanese continue to live more or less within these pressures to live in certain proper ways, however restrictive and unreasonable these pressures may seem to be. It is in this context that Japanese envisionings of life after death take the form for many not of moral guidance, but of moral escape. It is as if to say, "In this world I must perform in accordance with the eyes and expectations of others. But as for the next world, I can believe whatever I want to believe!"—including nothing at all, an option a significant number of Japanese choose.

In China, as reflected in our interviews, the communist government created a powerful secular moral order in the 1950s and 1960s, replacing various religious strands as the basis for society's moral order, and promising the symbolic immortality of a coming Chinese utopia. That moral order lost its legitimacy in the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and many Chinese have been left with belief neither in life after death in the next world nor in a future paradise in this world—leaving money and family as the only bases upon which to live. There are widespread beliefs in life after death today, particularly in reincarnation as well as in Christianity. However, while for some these beliefs may provide moral guidance, life after death in China seems for many more, particularly those who are older, neither a matter of moral guidance or moral escape, but rather moral loss—the promise of a communist world of love and equality, a secular utopia akin to heaven that has become instead an all-too-human world of corruption and pursuit of money. Many interviewees wished there were an afterlife that could serve to control the behavior of their fellow Chinese. In the absence of such an afterlife, they may hope that their own lives in this world can serve as a moral exemplar for those who follow them, in a Chinese world that has lost the moral basis it once had but now has no longer.

Within these three very broad portraits—life after death as moral guidance (the United States), life after death as moral escape (Japan), and life after death as moral loss and longing (China)—we can begin to better understand the relations of senses of life after death to ways of living before death in the United States, Japan, and China. As noted earlier, other portraits of these three societies are also possible—our findings are at this stage only tentative. We hope, eventually, through intensive individual and societal analysis, to come to a full understanding of the relation of senses of life after death to life as lived before death in the United States, Japan, and China, and thereby to see these three societies in a fuller and more complex analytical light. This chapter is a rough beginning of such an analysis.

NOTES

1. Islamic nations such as Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, and Iran, as well as largely or partially Christian nations such as the Philippines, Nigeria, and Uganda, have rates of belief in life after death of 85% or above. On the other hand, in European societies such as France and Germany and a range of others, less than half of respondents say they believe in life after death (Inglehart et al. 2004, 353). Although there are numerous exceptions, the very broad global trend is that, with the exception of the United States, the richer the society, the less the belief in life after death. Among developed countries, the only country with a higher percentage of belief in life after death than the United States is Chile, at 82%.

2. We should note that when the people we interviewed spoke of an existence beyond the grave, we generally asked them about the extent to which they felt such an existence might actually be the case: "What percent chance is there that you'll die and then find yourself in a life after death?" Thus interviewees' emphasis on percentages is an artifact of interviewing procedures, rather than because of statistical-mindedness on the part of interviewees.

3. In Japan it is wives who attend to the family household altar where regular offerings are made to the ancestors. These two women quoted here are both engaged in this practice on a daily basis.

4. What is cause and what is effect is unclear in this correlation. Perhaps high crime rates and personal insecurity lead more people to attend church in search of a sense of control over their lives.

5. Many NEETs (young people not employed or in education or training), *hikikomori* (young people who socially withdraw, often shutting themselves in their rooms, and *parasaito shinguru* (young adults who do not marry but remain dependent on their parents) sense no choice but to drop out, given limited opportunities provided by Japanese economic structures today, as many commentators have noted (Brinton 2010).

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Personhood, Memory, and Technology

Reincarnation, Christianity and Controversial Coffins in Northwestern Benin

Sharon Merz

> *Now they bury with coffins... When a person, who has been buried with a coffin that is nailed shut reincarnates, the [physical] birth will be complicated, complicated. It will be difficult. What do you do with the nails? They'll say that the woman is overdue; how do you get out of a coffin in time with those nails?*

(Interview with Ntanki)[1]

Ntanki, who has never attended church and is in his seventies, expressed just one of the problems people associate with coffins; namely that they are thought to be responsible for an increase in Caesareans and problematic births. Death occurs when a person's *kɛbodikɛ* (animating force) and *mtakimɛ* (identity) leave the physical body. *Kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* remain linked to the body though, and some people think that they are then trapped in the coffin. *Kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s struggle to escape the coffin is subsequently played out in their rebirth. Coffins (*tihidikpakite*, literally "dead-body-trunks") were first used in the 1990s. They have since

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proved controversial as many feel that they slow down reincarnation. For others, coffins are emblematic of modernity.

Varieties of reincarnation are widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa and especially in West Africa (cf. Baumann 1965, 32). In this chapter I explore the relationship between Bebelibe notions of reincarnation and funeral practices and how the introduction of coffins and the influence of Christianity are impacting this relationship and ideas in general about reincarnation. People often associate both coffins and Christianity with *upaanu* (the "new times," usually translated into French as *la modernité*) and that active engagement with *upaanu* helps a person to feel modern. In order to understand the controversy surrounding coffins, I start by providing some background information before briefly explaining Bebelibe understandings of the composition of the person and of reincarnation. I then examine the controversies surrounding coffins in greater detail and explore how some people have reinterpreted reincarnation and funeral practices as a result of *upaanu* (new times) and the arrival of Christianity in recent decades. The case of the Bebelibe demonstrates how people cope with the challenges and rupture that change can bring through a process of embellishment and negotiation, building on what they already understand. This process ensures continuity as change is negotiated, whilst also leading to new understandings and practices, and allows for incongruities to reside side by side.

Background

Situated in a mountainous area of the Atacora department, the Bebelibe are largely rural and live in loose-knit villages. With a population of around 69,500[2], most of the Bebelibe live in the Commune of Cobly, with some additional villages located in the neighbouring Commune of Boukoumbé and across the border in Togo (see Fig. 5.1). The French seized the Atacora region and integrated it into the colony of Dahomey (now known as the Republic of Benin) in the 1910s. Before colonisation, the Bebelibe had a non-centralised social structure, which was sometimes characterised as "anarchic" by early colonial observers (Cornevin 1981, 36; Grätz 2000, 682; Koussey 1977, 10; N'Tia 1993, 107, 113 & 116). N'Tia, however, considered them to be "eminently democratic" (1993, 117) as their social structure was founded on respect towards each community's elders and priests. These men would meet to discuss and decide how best to resolve community issues, often with help from diviners and through mediation
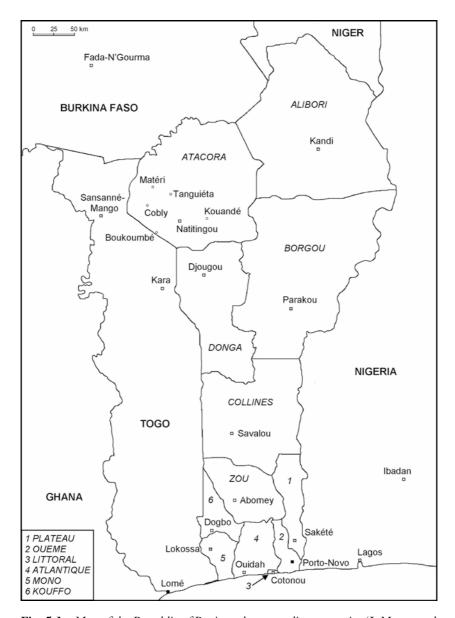
Fig. 5.1 Map of the Republic of Benin and surrounding countries (J. Merz, used with permission)

between the different parties involved—including those of the invisible world such as the *bɛhidibɛ* (dead)—and giving offerings when necessary.

During colonisation, French administrators decreed that each village should have a chief (Mercier 1968, 434). Today, each village elects its own chief as a representative of the democratic nation state, whilst the elders and priests remain responsible for ritual matters and minor questions of jurisdiction. Generally speaking—despite changes in the political structure—the underlying non-centralised social organisation still prevails and respect for others continues to be an important social principle.

All of the Bebelibe I know, regardless of their religious orientation, testify that *Uwienu* (God)[3] is the Supreme Being and creator of all. Although the majority of the population continues to follow the path of their ancestors, there is a significant Christian minority. Christianity only became established in the area in recent decades with the first Catholic missionaries arriving in the Commune in the late 1940s. The first Assemblies of God missionaries arrived in the early 1950s (Akibo 1998; Cornevin 1981, 436, 440–441, 453–454), while other evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries started to establish their respective denominations from the 1990s onwards. Ogouby (2008, 54–55) states that Christianity has increased from 10% in 1992 to 24% in 2002 in the Atacora and Donga regions of northwestern Benin. Although many Bebelibe have attended church at some point, I would estimate that regular church attendance in the Commune of Cobly is lower than Ogouby suggests. I have observed that Islam remains marginal.

Several people have told me that ideally burial should happen within twenty-four hours of dying due to the warm climate and rapid onset of putrefaction. The Mbelime[4] term for both death and burial is *mhuumu*. People who die a "good death" would ordinarily be buried in a small rounded burial chamber, which is kidney bean in shape. The entrance hole is just big enough to lower the body in feet first. Several men then arrange the body in a foetal position (see Fig. 5.2). A good death is due to natural causes and old age. Several months or years later, the good death of an adult is commemorated with *dihuude* (literally "death celebration"[5]).

Murder, suicide, lightning strikes, accidents, death during pregnancy or delivery and stillbirths are considered "bad deaths" as they result in people dying before their designated time. Bad deaths require additional rituals and their bodies are buried in rectangular graves. Since their introduction in the 1990s, coffins are slowly becoming more popular. Generally, people use coffins for good deaths, which necessitates a rectangular grave.

Fig. 5.2 Body in burial chamber in foetal position (J. Merz, used with permission)

The subject of death itself is not taboo and is part of everyday conversation. People willingly express their opinions about someone's *mhuumu* (burial) or *dihuude* (death celebration). The non-centralised nature of Bebelibe society means that people feel free to discuss critically how things are done, providing that respect is maintained. This, in turn, means that different attitudes and beliefs can co-exist. When differences threaten relationships, the parties involved do their best to negotiate a good solution, usually with the help of a mediator. Normally, if someone has given explicit instructions concerning their own burial, their children and family will honour them. Respect for others does not stop when they die. On the contrary, it is heightened as the *bɛhidibɛ* (dead) are considered closer to *Uwienu* (God) and mediate between him and the people. When discussions turn into disputes that are not easily resolved, the offended parties may take action by placing a curse on the offenders. They do this, for example, by explicitly exhorting the *bɛhidibɛ* to intervene on their behalf through inflicting sickness or another problem on the offenders. Sometimes the *bɛhidibɛ*

may decide to intervene, even when their help has not been explicitly sought, or should they feel directly offended. When people fall sick or encounter problems, their families may seek the advice of diviners to find out if a breakdown in relationships is the cause and, if so, how they should be restored (cf. Bacchiddu, this volume).

For this chapter, I draw on personal observations and conversations since 2002 and a series of interviews I conducted with fifty people from January to March 2012.[6] Of the fifty interviewees, only fifteen were women, nine of whom were widows. Generally, I have found that men are more forthcoming and willing to participate in research. This willingness may be because they represent the public face of the family. Amongst the women, widows are the exception as they assume roles normally performed by men and often become more forthright. Interviewees were between eighteen and ninety years old. Also, eight interviewees had never been to church, seventeen said they had attended church at some point in their lives, and twenty-five were churchgoers. Most of the interviewees rely on farming, though some are also employed. Thirty-three have had some form of schooling (which is in French) or formal training (e.g. apprenticeship programmes, adult literacy classes).

COMPOSITION OF THE PERSON AND REINCARNATION

Everyone I interviewed confirmed that each being has a physical form (*ukuɔnu* "body"), *kɛbodikɛ* (animating force), and *mtakimɛ* (which I refer to as identity). Some say that *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* are located in the torso (J. Merz 2014, 91). In addition, a person has *upinsihu* (fontanel and respiration), *mfoosimu* (breath), *diyammaade* (thinking/decision-making), *unitokihu* (ability to have healthy children), and *uhensihu* (shadow/reflection; the person's double). By and large, interviewees considered these as subcomponents of *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ*.

Interviewees explicated that *kɛbodikɛ* animates the body and provides the force needed to live, whilst *mtakimɛ* guides and orientates *kɛbodikɛ*, especially through discernment, seeing, interpretation of dreams, and a sense of right and wrong. It also protects and strengthens *kɛbodikɛ*. It includes a person's destiny and character and several interviewees explained that it is *mtakimɛ* that makes each individual unique. In sum, *mtakimɛ* provides individuals with their identity and the ability to relate to others. *Kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* are interdependent and when they work together in harmony the person is well balanced emotionally, mentally, and physically. This balance—or lack of it—affects the person's behaviour and character.

Kɛbodikɛ's and *mtakimɛ*'s interdependence, together with *mtakimɛ*'s relational nature, means that engagement with the world is inter-subjective or relational (Bird-David 2006, 44, Hornborg 2006, 29, Kohn 2007, 4), thereby creating a shared community (Bird-David 2006, 47–48). Ikenga-Metuh refers to this as "[e]xistence-in-relation" (1987, 263). Bebelibe ontology corresponds with what Ingold describes as "animic"[7] (2000, 112), which he sums up with the following statement: "[v]ital force . . . is free-flowing like the wind, and it is in its uninterrupted circulation that the continuity of the living world depends" (2000, 112). Ingold (1986, 248, 2000, 91–92) describes the body as the "container" or "vehicle" for what really constitutes an individual, therefore allowing individuals "to extend the spatiotemporal range of [their] movement, influence and experience" (Ingold 2000, 100; cf. Swanson 1985, 31, 38). As the old man Moutouama explained to Johannes Merz (my husband): "Our body [*ukuɔnu*] is our clothing" (2014, 104).

Most interviewees explained that dreams occur when *kɛbodikɛ* leaves the body when a person is sleeping. Dreams, then, are the living-out of *kɛbodikɛ*'s often-nocturnal activities. Whilst *kɛbodikɛ* is wandering, *mtakimɛ* stays put and maintains the bond with the body (cf. Erny 2007, 39). Physical death occurs when both *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* leave the body definitively, although their link with the body is not necessarily severed. For many of the interviewees, there is no material-spiritual dichotomy between the body, *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ*. As the body decomposes, *kɛbodikɛ*, and *mtakimɛ* are liberated to move on and reincarnate. Hence, there is a continual recycling of life through the decomposition of the physical body and rebirth (Ingold 1986, 250–251).

Huber (1973, 428–429, 433–436), a Swiss anthropologist who conducted research amongst the Bebelibe in 1966/1967, makes several observations about reincarnation and *mtakimɛ*, which he describes as the person's destiny. He (1973, 435) speculates that the Bebelibe have combined two theories: the idea of predetermined destiny (represented by *mtakimɛ*), which is either chosen by the person or designated by *Uwienu* (God), and that of the reappearance of ancestors in their descendants. He adds that neighbouring groups keep the two theories apart and that the idea of returning ancestors is especially widespread amongst the Bebelibe.

In Mbelime, the word for reincarnation is *disihide*. When I asked interviewees about *disihide*, the overwhelming majority, including those who have rejected reincarnation,[8] replied that this is when *Uwienu* (God)

authorises *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* to go and reincarnate. *Kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* not only remain united when death of the physical body occurs, but stay united when they reincarnate. Several interviewees explained that before they reincarnate, *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* negotiate their new destiny with *Uwienu* that includes the new individual's vocation in life. People's destiny also includes whether they will have a good or bad *unitokihu* (ability to have healthy children), when they should die, and their gender and form (human, tree, termite mound or animal[9]). Assuming *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* are reborn into another human, reincarnation is usually patrilineal, although it can also be matrilateral and occasionally into a different family with no blood or marital ties. Others intimated that *Uwienu* alone decides each individual's destiny. Thus it is *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* in their entirety, with their new destiny, that reincarnate.

Huber also noted that for the majority of his informants, *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* were identical (1973, 433). Conversely, the majority of my interviewees did not view the two as identical, but they *are* interdependent. Antoine, a nominal Catholic in his fifties, explained that according to his senior family members and the forefathers, the interdependent nature of *mtakimɛ* and *kɛbodikɛ* meant that they were treated together; so, for simplicity's sake, people would employ the term *mtakimɛ* when referring to them both. Antoine pointed out that many now treat the two as completely separate components, which he sees as a consequence of *upaanu* (new times) and the church, which teaches that they are the person's spirit and soul. I discuss this dichotomisation and what might be behind it next.

OLD AND NEW TIMES

Interviewees distinguished two eras: *ubɔɔyɔ* (old times) and *upaanu* (new times). They employed *upaanu* in a variety of ways, explaining that it includes all that is new: things, ideas, institutions, techniques, and practices. Those who speak French often translate *upaanu* as *la modernité* (modernity) and use *upaanu* when talking about colonial and post-colonial times. Geschiere, Meyer, and Pels warn against dichotomising modernity and tradition as this is "an ideological product of modernity itself" (2008, 3). They point out that such a dichotomy necessitates a "consciousness of temporal rupture … of there being two different, radically separated times—'modernity' and 'tradition'—of which one is more advanced" (2008, 3). The employment and understanding of *ubɔɔyɔ* and

upaanu by many of the Bebelibe I work with indicate that, for them, there *has* been a temporal rupture. The Bebelibe have never lived in isolation and have a long history of social engagement in the wider region through trade and migration. Bebelibe society is composed of twenty-three communities.[10] Many of these communities have their origins elsewhere or include families from other groups in the region. Thus, exposure to new things and socio-cultural change is not something new. What makes the currently perceived rupture significant is the rapidity of change and the way that the process of French colonisation recast the Bebelibe as backward (J. Merz 2014, 53–57). Johannes Merz explains that:

> At first sight, then, *upaanu* can to be understood as a direct result of the forceful trajectory of colonial modernity that the French imposed and that became embedded in the independent modern state. (2014, 57)

In this respect, the rupture experienced by the Bebelibe can be considered a product of what Johannes Merz calls "colonial modernity."

Several authors, writing about different African contexts, have observed that many people are attracted to Christianity as it allows them to move along a trajectory that offers an immediate association with modernity (e.g. Bayart [1998] 2008, 92–93; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 200–201; Erny 2001, 19; Horton 1971, 86; Manning 1998, 101; Merz 2008, 209; Meyer 1998, 1999). This trajectory can lead to a transition towards individualism, promotion of the nuclear family, increase in ownership rights, and commerce. This trajectory is especially evident amongst more urbanised Bebelibe Christians, who are often the most economically active people in Cobly, and reject many of the local customs. Other individuals have attended church, become disillusioned by it, and have left again. This disillusionment seems to be with the institutional nature of the church rather than with Christianity as a faith. Thus, they may still consider themselves Christians and are happy to appropriate ideas from the teaching they received, especially if these ideas help them to better understand the world around them. Similarly, some Bebelibe who have never been to church are also open to appropriating ideas that they learn from Christians. The way that *disɛnpode* (a bush being) has been readily accepted as the devil by churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike is a good illustration of this. Johannes Merz explains that the relatively recent adoption of *disɛnpode* as the devil helps people make sense of evil, which usually manifests itself through the disruption of normality. He points out that

the Bebelibe "did not accept the whole belief system presented by the missionaries. Rather, they appropriated the parts of it they found attractive on their own terms" (2008, 208). In a similar way, I propose that there is a two-way dynamic process at work as people are open to adapting and assimilating ideas about notions of life and death, especially if these ideas further their understanding of the changing world around them. This process of "embellishment" builds on people's underlying ontology and helps them to maintain continuity as they negotiate change. For those who draw on church teaching to embellish and refine their views, this process results in localised forms of Christianity (cf. Erny 2001, 18–19; Jindra 2011, 122; Meyer 1999, 268; Moore 2004, 71–72; Van Der Geest 2011), as I illustrate below.

Other institutions associated with *upaanu* (new times) include Western-style health care and an education system modelled on the French one, which is steadily growing. Although the school curriculum has now been adapted to include Beninese history, geography and African literature, early French colonial policy focused on teaching French language and culture. Some colonialists went as far as saying that the Beninese needed to be taught that they were of French descent (Garcia 1971; cf. Manning, Patrick 1998, 166). Philosophy, which includes Cartesian thinking, remains an important subject. Onyango-Ouma, who conducted research into how schools are perceived in rural Kenya, notes that:

> Modernity is the dominant discourse in the production of educated persons in the study schools. An educated person is also a modern person distinct from others in the community ... In constructing their sense of a schooled identity children distance themselves from an image of backwardness. (2006, 399)

During research conducted in the Commune of Cobly by Johannes Merz, several interviewees explained that becoming educated means that the person becomes white. He notes that:

> The notion of whiteness, however, "No longer a matter of skin colour [only] but of social relations and access to different forms of knowledge and material resources" (Gullestad 2007, 272). People in Cobly often include Beninese politicians, administrators, teachers and pastors, especially when they are literate in French, as being part of the whites.... (2014, 213)

Amongst those I interviewed, the introduction of new things, ideas, and institutions that have resulted in accelerated socio-cultural change, continue to be strongly associated with "the whites"—whether Caucasians or educated Africans—despite the end of colonialism. The introduction of coffins exemplifies this.

Coffins

Coffins, together with other material goods and practices introduced by white colonialists, were first popularised elsewhere in Benin and the wider region. Bebelibe individuals who had been exposed to these practices and goods—including coffins—elsewhere then introduced them locally. Robert, an ex-churchgoer in his thirties who works for a non-governmental organisation (NGO), noted that the first people to use coffins locally were Christians and *les intellectuels* (those who have been to school). Generally, the interviewees strongly associated coffins with the whites, acknowledging that coffins originated with them. They then explained that it was *les fonctionnaires*[11] (Beninese public service employees) who introduced coffins locally. Those who have a public service role have little choice about where they work, as their service department decides where they should work. Consequently, *fonctionnaires* are exposed to other cultural practices and ideas, including the use of coffins. Several interviewees added that if *fonctionnaires* died elsewhere, their bodies would be sent back to their families in a coffin. Patrick, an ex-churchgoer who has had some primary education and is in his thirties, expounded that:

> We say that we know French. That's what we follow. It has changed us. Before, we didn't know the whites. Now we have seen the whites, and have emulated them, we have learnt to speak and write French. Therefore those who were over there saw what the whites do. They're the ones who brought [coffins] here to show those of us who were uncivilised and now we are civilised...They took our children for the army and today our children go to school and become *fonctionnaires*, then they die. It's from over there that coffins came, and people who died over there were transported back here in coffins and we saw them. At that time if you were not a *fonctionnaire*, you couldn't be buried with a coffin. Then our children became apprentices and learnt and became carpenters and now they can make coffins. So even if you're not a *fonctionnaire* you can now be buried with a coffin.

Other people, such as migratory workers, have been exposed to coffins elsewhere too. David, a carpenter and ex-churchgoer in his thirties, mentioned that people also see coffins being used on television. It is *les fonctionnaires* of recent years who have popularised their use in the Commune of Cobly, as they had the financial means to pay for coffins and other "modern" burial paraphernalia. With time, others have started to do likewise, even if it means getting into debt, as many people now consider coffins and other "modern" burial paraphernalia to be essential for a decent burial.

The use of coffins necessitates rectangular graves, which have customarily been reserved for bad deaths. As noted above, those who died a good death would normally be buried in round burial chambers with the body arranged in a foetal position; the burial chamber can be likened to a womb (cf. Erny 2007, 27). Despite concern about the actual use of coffins and changes associated with them, the majority of interviewees were not worried that good deaths could now be buried in rectangular graves. Many interviewees pointed out, with a chuckle, that you could not put a rectangular coffin into a round hole. Except for some church burials, people still arrange the corpse on its side in the coffin, rather than on its back, in an attempt to emulate a foetal position.

Other changes that have accompanied the use of coffins include dressing the corpse, use of talcum powder and perfume, graves that are cemented and tiled, sometimes on the inside as well as the outside, and more recently, burial in the house of the deceased (July 2012) and burial in a mausoleum (March 2013). Some of these changes necessitate the use of a morgue, the closest being twenty-two miles away, as extra time is needed to prepare for the burial.

Some churches also encourage the use of coffins. Henri, a churchgoing carpenter in his thirties, and Lucas, a churchgoer in his early twenties studying for his *baccalauréat*, explained that their churches have a social fund and will help pay for a coffin if the family cannot afford it. During my conversation with Lucas, he implied that Christians should be buried in a coffin, and affirmed the link between Christianity and modernity:

Author: If someone is a believer and goes to church ... can a believer also say, "me, when I die, I don't want a coffin?"
Lucas: If he says that he doesn't want a coffin, he's deceived! Why? Because modernisation is already well established, it's prosperity ... if you go to church it means you accept everything; you can be a sinner and you seek pardon and you are [at church] because you accept all that one should do.

When I asked the interviewees what they thought about coffins, some of them were initially reticent to express their view if it appeared to be criticising the whites, so they simply said that coffins were good. As the interviews progressed, however, it was evident that for many, coffins are problematic, whether in terms of the practical considerations of cost, the social pressure to conform or their impact on reincarnation. Many interviewees gave multiple reasons why they were in favour, against or had mixed feelings about using coffins, as summarised in Table 5.1.

The most interesting juxtaposition between those in favour of coffins and those against concerned the body having contact with the earth. Six of the interviewees who favoured coffins explicitly stated that it protects the body from the earth; whilst nine of those who think coffins are bad also stated that it is because it protects the body from the earth.

Table 5.1 Coffins: good, bad or indifferent?

Good as...	
...it shows that we are modern	5
...it allows your children to demonstrate their gratitude	1
...the body is not exposed to dirt, mud, rodents, termites	6
No explanation given	10
Good but...	
...it's too expensive	3
...it creates social pressure to conform	1
...it has a negative impact on reincarnation	3
Bad as...	
...it's too expensive	6
...it creates social pressure to conform	3
...it has a negative impact on reincarnation	12
...the body cannot mix with the earth	9
...we should return as we came (just as we are, with no additional paraphernalia)	3
...you can no longer distinguish good from bad deaths	1
...it's the devil's work so people no longer respect our customs	1
...people no longer really know who they are (stuck between the old and new times)	1
Bad but...	
...it's the sign of the times, you can't stop change	1
...it's okay for others	1
Indifferent	2
Change can't be evaluated in terms of "good" and "bad"	1
No explanation given	2

For those who favoured coffins, the idea of the body getting dirty, eaten by worms or nibbled by rodents was distasteful and dishonouring to the deceased person. More importantly, these interviewees—together with several others who did not think that coffins are problematic for reincarnation—explained that as the bond between *kɛbodikɛ, mtakimɛ* and the physical body is completely severed at death, the coffin could not hinder someone from reincarnating. Here is what David, the carpenter and ex-churchgoer in his thirties, told me:

> When you die, before you're put in the coffin you're not there . . . You've already left, but some of our older relatives do not know this. They believe that you won't be able to leave [the coffin] and reincarnate, but this isn't the case . . . You have already left. It's only your body that's there. That's it. The spirit has already left.

This dichotomisation of matter and spirit has largely resulted from Christian teaching. For others who have not dichotomised matter and spirit to the same degree, coffins are problematic because the body needs to first mix with the earth for reincarnation to take place. This suggests that the bond between *kɛbodikɛ, mtakimɛ* and the body is not completely broken with death, but only once the body has returned to the earth. Several interviewees added that we need to become earth again as this is what *Uwienu* (God) used to create us. The degree to which the body needs to mix with the earth varied. Kodaani, a farmer and ex-churchgoer in his fifties, explained that the body needs to mix quickly with the earth and, in order to overcome the challenge that coffins present, some people now add some earth into the coffin. This being the case, for some it may not be the act of decomposition that is important, but actual contact with the earth.

Whilst people acknowledge that wood also rots, some interviewees, such as Idibiènou, an ex-churchgoer in her fifties, pointed out that it takes a lot longer for the body to return to the earth when buried in a coffin, and that as a result reincarnation is retarded. Consequently, she has told her children that she does not want to be buried with a coffin, neither should they cement her grave:

> I have told my children that the day I die, I don't want them to say that they placed me in a coffin. What they do there, they take cement to block [the grave] and I said I don't want that. My ancestors didn't do that.

For Joel, an ex-churchgoer in his twenties, the use of materials, such as glass in a coffin, blocks reincarnation entirely.

Others explained that although the coffin did not necessarily slow down reincarnation, it could blind or disorientate *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* so that the father-to-be and diviner cannot establish who the baby's reincarnating ancestor is. Patrick, the ex-churchgoer with some primary education in his thirties, implied that *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* lose their past identity, which means the person they reincarnate will not be normal:

> They say, "if you're buried with a coffin, you can no longer come out [reincarnate] as you were before." You will change. This means that you're neither Ubielo [singular of Bebelibe], nor white. You will come out and you won't be normal, as you were.

Patrick went on to explain that the coffin covers the deceased person's *upinsihu* (fontanel), which he likened to a socket that the *kɛbodikɛ* plugs into; that this is how *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* maintain their link with the corpse until it has decomposed. Placing the body in a coffin—and therefore covering the fontanel—means that *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s link with the corpse is prematurely severed and they no longer know who they are. For Patrick, then, *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* are not necessarily trapped in the coffin, but are rather denied access to the corpse. He later added that *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* need to verify that the corpse has fully decomposed before going on to reincarnate. If this is the case, then an individual's identity includes their physical being and it is only once this physical aspect has been reintegrated with the earth that *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* can assume a new identity whilst recalling who they were before.

Other interviewees argue that coffins rather trap *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* inside with the corpse. Philippe, a farmer and ex-churchgoer, who has some primary education and is in his late forties, explained it as follows:

> There are many, many people [buried in coffins] and their *mtakimɛ* can't get out . . . those who are buried directly in the ground, those people can get out. He/she must get out to become a complete person.

Tristan, a churchgoing university graduate in his forties, recently told me that he had planned to ask the carpenter to drill a hole at the foot end of his mother's coffin so that she could easily leave the coffin to reincarnate. The day of the burial, Tristan realised that he had forgotten about the

hole, so he made sure that the lid of the coffin was not nailed shut. Ntanki (see Introduction) too expressed concern about coffins that are nailed shut trapping people inside them and drew an analogy between being nailed in and difficult births. Other interviewees also thought that Caesareans have increased since coffins were introduced. Robert, the ex-churchgoing NGO worker in his thirties, linked this to *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s struggle to escape the coffin, which is subsequently played out in their physical rebirth. Besides coffins, the issue of decomposition is further reflected through *dihuude*, the funeral celebrations that follow several months or years after *mhuumu* (death and burial).

Dihuude and the Grave Pot

Dihuude (death celebration) commemorates those who have died a good death. *Dihuude* celebrations take place during the hot season (March–May) when agricultural activities are minimal. *Dihuude* is an important time of social networking and reinforcing ties between the maternal and paternal families of the deceased. Many of the interviewees lamented the escalating costs of *dihuude*, which are mainly due to increasing expectations of the maternal family, whose demands for more meat, drink, and entertainment need to be met. Conventionally, *dihuude* should be held for the deceased during the hot season following their death, but many families now postpone it until they have the means to afford it. This, in turn, creates a backlog of uncelebrated deaths.

There are aspects of *dihuude* that exemplify why it is important for the flesh of the corpse to decompose. The different events of *dihuude* build up to two people (one from each side of the family) placing a large earthenware pot upside down at the head of the grave of the deceased (see Fig. 5.3). They then pierce a hole in the pot. The pot and its hole have several functions. Firstly, they mark the grave and can be compared to a gravestone. Secondly, and more importantly, many of the interviewees explained that the pot provides a house for the deceased, whilst the hole is the door or window. This, in turn, allows the deceased to come and go and to "breathe."

Yammu, who has never been to church and is in his nineties, explained that *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* pass by the hole to go in search of a woman in order to reincarnate:

> Yammu: You pierce the hole and it's night and he's lying in the grave. He's lying in the grave and if he wants to reincarnate, yes, when he

Fig. 5.3 Piercing a hole in the earthenware pot (photo by the author)

> wants to leave, he leaves by the hole there and he goes to the woman and her husband who are asleep. Ah ha, he arrives when they are asleep and he waits beside the woman. The time comes when the husband gets up and wants his wife. What does he [the deceased] do? He enters [the woman during intercourse] and is transformed into blood and then a person.

Author: And is it *kɛbodikɛ, mtakimɛ* that leave by there, by the hole?

Yammu: *Mtakimɛ* and *kɛbodikɛ*. Yes, that's what leaves. And afterwards, they go into houses and women get pregnant with them. Women get pregnant with those who reincarnate. The woman gets pregnant with him.

For others, such as Joel (the ex-churchgoer in his twenties), Patrick (the ex-churchgoer with some primary education in his thirties), and Basaadi (a village priest in his seventies), the hole is the doorway by which *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* can visit to verify that the body has decomposed. Patrick and

Basaadi's explanations suggest that it is only once the body has returned to the earth that a new body for *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* can be created from the old:

Patrick: When *kɛbodikɛ* returns from *Uwien' seede* (God's homestead), from heaven, it's via the hole they pierced that *kɛbodikɛ* will enter to touch the soil and make contact once again with the body in order to take it and form a new child that the parents will give birth to. That's why they pierce the hole. Thus, when *kɛbodikɛ* comes, it's via the hole that it must enter.

Basaadi: The hole has been pierced. The body that they buried, when the body will be in the hole and his *kɛbodikɛ* there, the time when he wants to reincarnate a new being, the body must leave by the hole there to go together with *kɛbodikɛ*.

Many interviewees now perceive the pot and hole in largely symbolic terms as today, by the time *dihuude* may take place, the deceased has often already reincarnated. *Dihuude* also represents the official "sending off" of the deceased to join the other ancestors.

Material Transformation

I now examine more closely the implications of what the interviewees expressed about how *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* and reincarnation are understood. My research suggests that Huber's (1973, 434–435) conclusions that reincarnation and destiny (represented by *mtakimɛ*) are interdependent within Bebelibe thought, and the importance attributed to reincarnation as compared to other groups in the area, seem to be justified. He proposes that the Bebelibe have fused the two notions of destiny and reincarnation, whilst other groups maintained them as distinct. Yet the contrary could be true. If reincarnation has diminished importance in the surrounding groups, could it be that they have separated out the two notions that were previously together? This would need further research.

My findings also suggest that Huber's interpretation of *mtakimɛ* as "destiny" is too limiting. As described above, *mtakimɛ* is not only composed of an individual's destiny, but includes characteristics (such as discernment and a sense of right and wrong) that allow people to relate well with one another. Furthermore, it provides individuals with their identity and enables purposeful relationships with others. This ability to

relate is essential to living in a shared community. Relationships and community not only include other people and animals, but also things, both natural and manmade. For many Bebelibe, things can also have *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ*. Thus, in order for someone to relate and interact with something or someone else, each entity needs to have *mtakimɛ*. Relationships and interactions also provoke emotional responses. As the old man Kombiénou challenged Johannes Merz: "Things have *mtakimɛ*. If they didn't have it, could we love them? If they didn't have it, wouldn't we throw them away? Everything we love has *mtakimɛ*" (2014, 95). Things are said to be dead when they can no longer fulfil their purpose and relate to other entities. Their *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* then give life and identity to other new things. The cyclical nature of life means that "[e]verything that lives also shares in past and future life" (J. Merz 2014, 97; cf. Gottlieb 2004, 80), which concurs with Sundermeier's suggestion that for many Africans "[t]o exist means 'to be related to'...The body of the human being does not exist 'in itself'; its 'being' refers to relations and indicates origins" (1998, 12). Writing about the Gourmantché (northern neighbours of the Bebelibe), Swanson (1985, 158) concluded that life is directional rather than cyclical. It would seem that neither word quite fits the Bebelibe situation as the relational nature of *mtakimɛ* stretches both backwards and forwards to encompass past, present, and future generations (cf. Erny 2007, 115). This being the case, life is both cyclical and multi-directional and ensures that *mtakimɛ*'s relationality is maintained across generations, which in turn promotes social cohesion.

For some, however, there has been a subtle, but significant shift in how they understand *mtakimɛ*'s and *kɛbodikɛ*'s relationship with the physical body, as the two are being dematerialised (Keane 2007, 87) and consequently spiritualised. Before the arrival of modern institutions—such as churches and schools—the concept of spiritual beings and invasive or "executive" possession (Cohen 2008) did not exist, given that *mtakimɛ* allows one to interact with other beings non-invasively (S. Merz 2017, 126; J. Merz 2014, 100). Likewise for the Tallensi of northern Ghana, executive possession was considered "inconceivable" (Fortes and Mayer 1966, 11) and "totally alien" (Fortes 1987, 148). The first missionaries to Cobly were faced with the challenge of expressing religious concepts to the Bebelibe. Hence, Christians started to employ *mtakimɛ* and *kɛbodikɛ* for "spirit" and "soul". The first Catholic missionaries translated *kɛbodikɛ* as spirit and *mtakimɛ* as soul, whilst the first Protestant missionaries translated the two terms the other way round. Consequently, there is

disagreement between church denominations about which one is the person's soul and which one is the person's spirit when translating between French and Mbelime. Despite this, the underlying notion of animating force for *kɛbodikɛ* and identity for *mtakimɛ* remains. The main consequence of such language use and church teaching, in general, is a dichotomisation of matter and spirit. This situation is not unique to the Bebelibe. Fast describes a similar situation for the Xhosa of South Africa when missionaries first arrived:

> Central to missionary teachings on death was the belief in a soul which was spiritual, an entity completely separate from the physical self which lived on after corporeal death. Among the Xhosa, there was no clear distinction between soul-shadow-body . . . . (1993, 164)

Fast (1993) continues by explaining that the Xhosa word for "breath" was used for "soul" and that, with time, some individuals seemed to take on the concept of a separate soul.

The dematerialisation and spiritualisation of *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* does not necessarily alter the underlying animic ontology though; it is rather the nature of *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s indwelling that changes. Rather than being integrated *with* the physical body, they now reside in it. One outcome of this change is that some Bebelibe now talk about the existence of spiritual beings and the possibility of being possessed. More importantly, this shift in understanding about *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s relationship with the physical body means there is a quick and complete separation of *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* from the physical body following death. Such a shift in understanding means that the threat of coffins diminishes as they no longer interrupt the circulation of *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* on which the living world depends. Likewise, the role of *dihuude* changes as people downplay its ceremonial role, whilst the aspect of celebration and family union is heightened. In order to understand this shift more fully, I now examine why *mhuumu* (death and burial) and *dihuude* (death celebrations) are two distinct events.

Having analysed the funeral practices of the Dayaks of Borneo, and taking into consideration those of several other societies, Hertz (1907, 1960) exposes a tripartite relationship between the state of the body, that of the soul and that of the mourners. He discovered that many societies hold two funerals for the deceased. This "wet" and "dry" double-funeral[12] practice has its origins with the need for the flesh to decompose, leaving

behind the dry bones, before the soul is properly liberated. He suggests that "the soul never suddenly severs the ties which bind it to its body and which hold it back on earth" (1960, 36). Hertz explained that the theme of wet and dry funerals is linked to the idea that, for many, death is not instant, but rather a transition and only ends when the body has decomposed and that "while the old body falls to ruins, a new body takes shape, with which the soul—provided the necessary rites have been performed—will enter another existence..." (1960, 48). In the same way, the Bebelibe practice of *mhuumu* (burial) followed by *dihuude* (death celebration) seems to be in line with Hertz's analysis. Some interviewees, such as Yammu (no church in his nineties), Joel (ex-church in his twenties), Patrick (ex-church in his thirties), and Basaadi (village priest in his seventies), linked the placing of the pot and piercing the hole during *dihuude* to *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s need to verify the state of the corpse before they can reincarnate. Patrick and Basaadi alluded to a new body being created from the old. It is probable that the round burial chamber, which many older Bebelibe still insist on having, with the body placed in the foetal position, further reflects the need for the body to decompose before *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* can be reborn. Dupire (1982), writing about the Serer Ndout of Senegal, and Sewane (2001, 195–196, 2003, 322–324), who writes about the Betammaribe (southwestern neighbours of the Bebelibe), both mention the importance of the body decomposing before reincarnation can take place. Sewane (2001, 195–196, 2003, 322–324) adds that it is only once the bones are dry and white that the deceased can form new children. Guigbile (2001, 187–188), writing about the Moba of northern Togo, draws a parallel with pregnancy and birth by suggesting that if nine months are needed for a child to form in the mother's womb, a similar amount of time is needed for the body's deconstruction, as it is only once the flesh has decomposed entirely that the deceased is able to move on.

For many of the interviewees though, the significance of *dihuude* is changing, with the pierced earthenware pot taking on a more symbolic role. I propose that this transition from practical to symbolic rituals is linked to the process of *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s dematerialisation and spiritualisation, which allows for their complete and immediate separation from the body when it dies. This seems to be in line with Keane's (2007, 87) observation that dematerialisation can result in rituals being stripped away, and Arhin's opinion that Christianity "has helped in advancing the conversion of a predominantly sacred event into a profane one" (1994, 313). The

situation is further exacerbated by the mounting cost of *dihuude*. With the dematerialisation and spiritualisation of *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ*, and the transition of *dihuude* to the symbolic, it becomes more feasible for families to postpone *dihuude*, as they no longer think it is needed for reincarnation to happen. This supports Jindra's observation that such events have "lost their urgency" because they have "lost their religious moorings" (2011, 126). Others—mainly churchgoers—have abandoned *dihuude* completely by combining its celebratory aspects with the burial. Many interviewees—both church and non-churchgoers—emphasised *dihuude*'s importance for social networking and maintaining family cohesion. Thus it seems that it is this aspect that is taking precedence today—both during *mhuumu* (burial) and *dihuude* celebrations—whilst other ceremonial aspects are diminishing in significance.

Several interviewees intimated that in order to maintain their social standing, debt was preferable to mockery (cf. Bacchiddu and Seebach, this volume).

During the interviews, I regularly felt exasperated when people lamented for the past and shared their discontent over the escalating costs of *mhuumu* and *dihuude*, the social pressure to conform and the resulting debts this created. If people are so unhappy with the situation, why do they conform? Noret (2011, 165–166), writing about southern Benin, also notes the anxieties funeral costs create. I later realised that being indebted to others—who are usually related in some way—is part of living in a shared community and probably helps maintain social cohesion. It is also possible that, by complaining, people are demonstrating that they have done their best for the deceased, without appearing to show off. The underlying meaning of these complaints would need more research.

Nostalgia plays a role too as people strive to make sense of the abomination as well as the blessing of modernity (Geschiere et al. 2008, 1; cf. Lee and Vaughan 2008, 343–344, 357–358). But could it also be that people hope to consolidate family unity through the means of extravagant festivities? Van der Geest observes that in southern Ghana "[f]unerals provide occasions for the living to demonstrate their social, political, and economic excellence. Money indeed measures the quality of the funeral and the family" (2006, 487; cf. Arhin 1994). In an earlier article, Van Der Geest (2000) concludes that good funerals are important as they demonstrate the family's prestige through their success in life and the respect and admiration they have gained from others, whilst also publicly displaying family solidarity.

Keane points out that "[d]ematerialised religion has consequences for agency" (2007, 87). As noted above, *mtakimɛ* provides individuals with their identity and enables them to relate to the world around them. As *mtakimɛ* becomes spiritualised, what are the implications for social cohesion? Many Bebelibe I know complain that social cohesion *is* breaking down. If, as I argue, this is linked to a change in how *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* are perceived, then other means of maintaining cohesion are needed, such as promoting the festive aspects of funerals. Van Der Geest (2006) suggests that technological change can lead to increased commercialisation and heightened competition between families wanting to demonstrate their social prestige. The availability of morgues, for example, means that people are no longer limited by time constraints when planning a burial. He adds that the influence of money and the importance of maintaining social prestige means that funerals have become "celebrations for the living, using the corpse and curriculum vitae of the deceased as a means to achieve glory for themselves" (2006, 496).

Monga (1995), a Cameroonian economist writing about funerals in West and Central Africa, states that rituals have lost their legitimacy and are now inspired by flashy modernism as the new middle-class seek self-glorification rather than maintaining solidarity with the deceased. So what does it mean to be modern?

Being Modern

During my interviews, the majority of the interviewees regularly referred to *ubɔɔyɔ* (old times) by describing what they had learnt from their *tɔɔ denbɛ* (father people) or *parents* (their fathers and forefathers) in French. Several interviewees went on to explain how things have changed with *upaanu* (new times), sometimes for the better, sometimes not. When I asked how burial practices had changed since the interviewees' childhood, however, several people responded that they had not changed. This surprised me given that coffins were not used when the people concerned were youngsters. In order to clarify the situation, I asked if anything had been introduced to the burial ceremony during their lifetime. Interviewees then went on to give examples of how the burial ceremony has been embellished through the introduction of coffins, perfume, talcum powder, dressing the corpse, construction of elaborate tombs, etc. Following Lee and Vaughan, "the elaboration of funerals is not a 'new' African invention" (2008, 358). Thus, the appropriation of

new paraphernalia or "[c]ommodities, therefore, need to be seen as potentially malleable mediators of local cultural values, and not simply as markers of Western capitalist consumption" (Lee and Vaughan 2008, 358). Whilst certain interviewees perceived specific changes—such as the introduction of coffins—as good, others thought them bad, illustrating that coffins continue to be controversial. Some justified the use of such commodities as signs of becoming modern. This complexity of ideas exemplifies the "disjunctures and contradictions" (Geschiere et al. 2008, 2) that exist when trying to come to terms with modernity.

Geschiere et al. point out that the word "modern" is "one of those 'words that fly'—perhaps because its promise of a better life gives an illusory consistency to the often contradictory variety of its contents" (2008, 1; cf. Thomassen 2012, 169) and that "[d]efinitions of modernity easily invoke a kind of internal balance, clarity and closure" (2008, 2). This search for balance, which often results in the creation of moral dualisms, seems to be especially prevalent among certain forms of Christianity such as Pentecostalism (cf. Laurent 2003, 274–275; J. Merz 2008, 208–209). The fact that those I interviewed dichotomised *ubɔɔyɔ* (old times) and *upaanu* (new times) indicates that they are searching for such balance and clarity, and possibly even closure, as they try to come to terms with the reality and rapidity of the socio-cultural change they are experiencing.

Although some of my interviewees—usually urban churchgoers with formal education—clearly saw themselves as more modern than the "*païens*" (pagans), as they often call those who do not go to church, the non-churchgoers demonstrated that they too are part of the modern world and are searching to make sense of the rupture that they associate with *upaanu*. How individuals interact with *upaanu* varies depending on what they appropriate from the different influences they are exposed to. Following Geschiere et al., different "trajectories of modernity" (2008, 5) are apparent in all societies. Such trajectories reflect the interplay between people's understandings or interpretations of a given situation and their resulting actions and reactions, as the interviewees' different ways of dealing with coffins, funerals, and reincarnation demonstrate. Thus, I consider those who continue to adhere to reincarnation in its more or less "traditional" form are no less modern than those who have rejected it, nor did I find a clear correlation of trajectories according to church attendance. For example, Sinbonko, who is in his seventies and has never been to church or school, wants to be buried in a coffin. He does not think that coffins block reincarnation given that *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* have already left; whilst

Sébastien, who is in his twenties, goes to church and has completed secondary education, thinks that coffins do block reincarnation and stated that he sides with tradition. Although Sinbonko has not been to school, he has broadened his views and appropriated some of the practices that he was exposed to in Ghana and travelling to other parts of Benin.

Piot, writing about the Kabre of northern Togo, explicates that the savannah region of West Africa "has long been globalized and is better conceptualized as existing within modernity" (1999, 1). He realises that this may seem contrary to appearances with the Kabre's apparent "earmarks of a still pristine African culture" (1999, 1). Piot explains that the Kabre's "apparently traditional features...owe their meaning and shape" as much to their "encounters with Europe" over the centuries as to their indigenous origins (1999, 1; cf. Piot 2001; Horton 1975, 392–393; Ikenga-Metuh 1987, 279–281; Meyer 1999; xix; Lee and Vaughan 2008, 356). The Kabre's interactions with others and appropriation of ideas from elsewhere are deliberate and the society cannot be considered bounded or internally focused, nor is it possible to separate "tradition" from "modernity" (Piot 1999, 16–24; 173–174, 2001, 165; cf. Geschiere 1997, 8). Renne, writing about perceptions of fertility in a southwestern town of Nigeria, notes that there is an "ongoing dialogue" rather than a "uniform shift from a 'traditional' religious view to a 'modern' secular one" (2002, 564; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; xi, xxii). The village, following Lambert, should be considered a translocal community (cited in Gugler 2002, 25), whilst Gupta and Ferguson note that "instead of assuming the autonomy of the primeval community, we need to examine how it was formed as a community out of the interconnected space that always already existed" (1992, 8). Finally, Nkrumah points out that "[o]ur society is not the old society, but a new society enlarged by Islamic and Euro-Christian influences" ([1964] 2008, 87; cf. Parrinder 1957, 264). These observations are equally valid for the Bebelibe. During encounters and interactions with others that predated the arrival of colonialism, people had more time to assess, choose, assimilate or reject the new things they encountered. As previously mentioned, the rupture that people experience is due to the rapidity of change that colonialism has induced and the fact that it not only exposed people to new things, but to the notion of modernity itself and its antithesis "tradition".

One set of trajectories that many people are attracted to is Christianity, as they equate becoming a Christian with becoming modern. This search for "modernity" is not without its challenges. Several of my interviewees

explained the struggle they have as they try to come to terms with the eschatological teaching they receive. These interviewees have either reinterpreted how reincarnation happens or have concluded that reincarnation does not happen at all. As yet, published Scripture does not exist in Mbelime and many churchgoers rely on teaching and interpretation by others, unless they are literate in French or Ditammari, a neighbouring language. It is hard to ascertain, then, to what degree the Bible has truly influenced people's perception of reincarnation and how much is based on what they have been taught in church and Sunday school. For some individuals who have studied the Bible for themselves, there are passages that seem to support the notion of reincarnation (cf. Jaton-Kunz 1986; Schönborn 1986). Luc (a church leader in his thirties), for example, explained that only the best Christians reincarnate, as God sends them out on special missions. Although Luc has never been to school, he has since learnt French. He backed up his understanding of reincarnation biblically by referring to John the Baptist as the prophet Elijah returned.

Emile (thirties, some secondary school), Adrien (twenties, has his *baccalauréat*), Edith (fifties, no school), and Henri (the carpenter in his thirties) all attend the same church and have rejected reincarnation after learning about the end times, heaven and hell during Sunday school. Others who attend the same church—such as Isabelle (thirties, some primary school) and Esther (sixties, no school)—have not and remain convinced that reincarnation happens, despite church teaching to the contrary. Esther thinks that everyone reincarnates, whilst Isabelle qualified that only Christians reincarnate whilst non-Christians go to be with the devil.

Thus, different trajectories result in different localised forms of Christianity. Following Noret, these Christianities result from "entanglements of 'traditional' and Christian habits of thought," which may be "considered as a general trait of African religious modernities" (2011, 174). I would add that this is a trait of many forms of Christianity worldwide (cf. Lee and Vaughan 2008, 353). With regard to reincarnation and eschatology, these variations included Luc's position that only the best Christians reincarnate, Isabelle's stance that only Christians reincarnate whilst non-Christians join the devil, and Marc's (churchgoer in his forties) and Matthieu's (churchgoer in his twenties) belief that only non-Christians reincarnate. For those who held that everyone reincarnated, becoming a Christian diminishes *Uwienu*'s (God's) judgement and ensures a warm welcome when the person returns to *Uwien' seede*

(God's homestead). This supports Meyer's view that "indigenous inter-pretations of Christianity are not *given* by the missionary, but *made* by converts themselves in a process of appropriation (often against the mean-ings the missionaries intended to evoke)" (1995, 125). For those who have rejected reincarnation in favour of eternal, non-cyclical, life either with *Uwienu* or in hell, it would seem that they are moving towards an understanding of "the person as a bounded individual" (Bloch 1988, 15), which brings me to the issue of reincarnation versus "Eternal Life."

REINCARNATION VERSUS "ETERNAL LIFE"

Fast, writing about the Xhosa of South Africa, notes that missionaries assumed that everybody feared death and saw it as "a complete separation from life" in this world, and that they would therefore welcome the news that "heaven awaited those who had found and followed the way provided by Jesus Christ" (1993, 162–163). Yet for many African societies, death does not necessarily result in such a separation and, although certain types of death are feared, death itself is needed in order for life to continue. For those who grow old, death is even welcomed (Van Der Geest 2002). Zahan (1965, 178, 1986, 63; cf. Ikenga-Metuh 1987, 274) notes that the Bambara of Mali and other "traditional" Africans are strongly attached to life on earth and leave with the hope of returning; life elsewhere holds little interest for them. Ikenga-Metuh (1987, 267–268; cf. Okwu 1979, 21) explains that with each new life, people hope their circumstances will improve, whilst Horton points out that the idea that "life in this world is the best there is" (1984, 415) is in complete opposition to Christian, Hindu and Buddhist thinking, which consider the worldly life flawed and strive for a "condition utterly different and incomparably better" (1984, 416; cf. Erny 2007, 117; Parrinder 1957, 265–266; Stevenson 1985, 15–16).

Given that many of the Christians I interviewed still adhere to reincarna-tion, I was curious to know why they started going to church. Several of the interviewees shared that it was because they hoped to improve their current circumstances. In his article on *Salvation and Materialism in African Theology*, Ngong explains that "salvation means averting situations that diminish human material well-being" (2009, 3). He (2009, 14; cf. Meyer 1999, 212–216) adds that the Pentecostal movements and African Indigenous Churches are popular as they provide a means of overcoming life-threatening forces, whilst promoting physical well-being. Consequently, people are initially attracted to Christianity, not because of the eschatological

benefits of being "saved" and gaining eternal life, but rather the immediate physical and material benefits associated with it, together with the promise of "upward social mobility" (Meyer 1999, 96; cf. Van Der Geest 2002, 20) and in order to be viewed as civilised (Meyer 1999, 177). For many of my interviewees, going to *Uwien' seede* (God's homestead) was not associated with achieving a state of perfection and spending eternity with *Uwienu* (God); it was rather a temporary homecoming before returning to continue an earthly existence. As a result, the Christian message of spending eternity with *Uwienu* seems to have had little impact and notions of reincarnation are not necessarily challenged.

The situation seems to be similar elsewhere. Van Der Geest (2002) notes that despite the many Christian churches and the general importance ascribed to biblical texts and Bible reading in Ghana, Christian notions of heaven and hell were not commonly accepted. Duru, writing about the Igbo of Nigeria, points out that reincarnation "is one notion which the missionaries have been unable to dispel" (1983, 3). Bastide (1965), writing about Afro-Americans, concluded that reincarnation had metamorphosed by taking on an eschatological dimension that promised an escape from a society full of racial prejudice where the Afro-American had no chance of advancing, as it gave hope of being reborn elsewhere.

Meyer (1999, 78–80) reports that Christian teaching about heaven, hell, and Judgement Day created ambiguities amongst the Ewe of Ghana that remain unresolved. A similar situation seems to exist amongst Bebelibe churchgoers. The example above of Emile, Adrien, Edith and Henri, who have rejected reincarnation, versus Isabelle and Esther, who have not, illustrates how they have reached different conclusions, despite attending the same church. Some churchgoers have incorporated the notion of hell—or the devil's actions—into the ongoing cycle of life, at least for non-Christians. Marc (churchgoer in his forties), for example, explained that it is the devil who sends non-Christians back to reincarnate. Nicole has completed secondary school and is in her twenties. Although she does not go to church, her friends do. She too shared that non-Christians will be judged more harshly as they are sinners. After seeing the better treatment that Christians receive, they are more likely to become Christians in their next life. For some, then, reincarnation means non-Christians are provided with another chance to convert. This being the case, reincarnation is remodelled to reflect the Asian model that emphasises individuality and redemption (Sundermeier 1998, 24–25). For

the moment, it seems that for many interviewees, reincarnation continues to be more attractive than spending eternity in *Uwien' seede* (God's homestead) or hell.

CONCLUSION

Death is not considered the end of life, but rather part of the cycle of reincarnation. A person dies when their *kɛbodikɛ* (animating force) and *mtakimɛ* (identity) definitively leave the physical body. Their link with the body is not completely severed until the corpse has decomposed, leaving only the bones. During *dihuude* (death celebrations), an earthenware pot is placed upside down at the head of the grave, and a hole is pierced in it so that *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* can "breathe." Thus liberated, they are free to reincarnate. Having negotiated a new destiny, *Uwienu* (God) authorises *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* to be reborn. The relational nature of *mtakimɛ* promotes social cohesion by ensuring that relationships are maintained across generations.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the relatively recent arrival of modern institutions, such as churches, and modern paraphernalia, such as coffins, are impacting funeral practices and how *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* are understood. Coffins have proved controversial, as many fear they slow down reincarnation by preventing the corpse from decomposing quickly and mixing with the earth. Meanwhile, in an effort to communicate the Christian message, missionaries used *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* to translate "soul" and "spirit". This has led to *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* being dematerialised and spiritualised by some. Although the dematerialisation and spiritualisation of *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* does not necessarily alter people's underlying "animic ontology" (Ingold 2000, 112), it does change the nature of *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s indwelling. Rather than being integrated with the physical body, they now reside in it. Thus dichotomised, *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s separation from the body is immediate and complete at the moment of death. For those who accept this, coffins no longer pose a threat, as *kɛbodikɛ*'s and *mtakimɛ*'s link with the physical body is completely severed with death and therefore, coffins do not interrupt the circulation of *kɛbodikɛ* and *mtakimɛ* on which the living world depends. The role of *dihuude* also changes with a focus on family festivities rather than ceremonies.

Christian teaching, however, seems to have had little effect on the local understanding that reincarnation happens. Although some people have rejected reincarnation in favour of eternity in heaven or hell, most

continue to hold that reincarnation happens in some form or another. People appropriate the parts of Christianity and modernity that they find attractive on their own terms. This results in different trajectories of modernity and localised forms of Christianity.

Thinking about the implications of these findings for an understanding of death more generally, the idea of embellishment comes to the fore. Several interviewees explained that burial practices had not changed since their childhood, which surprised me given that coffins were not used when they were youngsters. When I asked, however, what had been introduced to the burial ceremony, the same people would talk about the arrival of coffins and other paraphernalia. For them, the basic burial ceremony has not changed but has rather been embellished. In a similar way, it could be said that people's underlying understanding of death is embellished by the introduction of new things and ideas. This process of "embellishment" not only helps to provide continuity, but can also result in new understandings, which people build on and which may modify their practices or how they interpret them accordingly. At times people's understandings and practices can also appear to be contradictory, as they incorporate and negotiate the changes that embellishment provokes. Thus, in order to make sense of change, people draw on what they already know, and so starts a process of negotiation—whether this is conscious or not—as they try to make sense of new things, ideas, and associated practices that not only challenge, but sometimes result in rupture.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms. Unless otherwise stated, all interviewee quotes are from interviews I conducted from January to March 2012.
2. Assuming an average annual growth rate of 3.42% based on the census data between 2002 and 2013 and other data (Tchegnon and Guidibi 2006a; 15, 2006b, 15, 17; Gblem-Poidi and Kantchoa 2012, 259; INSAE 2015, 13), the total Mbelime-speaking population is around 69,500 for 2016.
3. The Mbelime word *uwienu* refers both to God—the Supreme Being and creator of all—and the sun (cf. Huber 1973, 378). When speaking in French, both Christians and non-Christians alike employ the word *Dieu* when referring to *Uwienu* the Supreme Being, whom they consider as male.
4. The Bebelibe and their language, Mbelime (which is part of the Gur family), are also known by the now derogatory names Niendé (Cornevin 1981, 36) or Nyende (Huber 1973).
5. Today people also use the word *dihuude* to denote any celebration.
6. For a more detailed write-up of my research and findings, see S. Merz (2013).

7. Ingold (2000, 112–115) contrasts totemism and animism by examining what he calls "totemic" and "animic" ontologies. With a totemic ontology, a being's vital force originates from the land; whilst with an animic ontology "life is itself generative of form" (2000, 112). Thus, vital force is not bound to the land but circulates freely.

8. Thirty-eight of the interviewees affirmed that reincarnation happens, whilst eight (seven churchgoers, one ex-church) rejected reincarnation and four (all churchgoers) expressed uncertainty.

9. Reincarnation is usually species specific. Under special circumstances (such as a pitiful life or a bad death), however, a being may change species.

10. Huber (1979, 9–10) lists nineteen communities, which he refers to as clans.

11. *Les fonctionnaires* is a broad term that refers to civil servants, people working in state administration and public-sector workers such as teachers, doctors, post-office employees, etc.

12. "Double obsèques" in the original (Hertz 1907, 49).

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CHAPTER 6

For the Solace of the Young and the Authority of the Old Death: Photography in Acholi, Northern Uganda

Sophie H. Seebach

Lanyero[1] gently hands me the photograph (Fig. 6.1). Her long fingers hold it like it is something fragile, something alive that she is afraid to harm. Tears sparkle in the corners of her eyes, as she looks down at the picture of the last moment when she, her husband, and young son were in the same place at the same time. In the photograph, she is standing over her husband's coffin, looking down on his lifeless face. She holds her son tightly as he gazes at the father he will never remember.

"How do you feel about having this picture?", I ask carefully.

"It creates reflections. I come to think that in this period in time I had this miserable moment."

"Would it be easier to throw it away?"

"No, I want to keep it."

"Why?", I wonder, thinking that she might spare herself some pain, had she not this constant reminder of her dead husband.

"For the boy. When my husband died, he was eight months and three weeks old. He has no picture of his father in his mind. He asks 'Where is daddy? What does daddy look like?' Then I can pick [up] the album and say

S.H. Seebach (✉)
Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus, Denmark

Fig. 6.1 Lanyero's picture of her dead husband

'This is your daddy. He is dead.' Then my son will ask 'When a person is dead, will he come back?', and I will answer 'No, he does not come back.' He still asks sometimes, but he has come to understand."[2]

Based on fieldwork in the town of Gulu in Acholi, Northern Uganda, this chapter explores the role of photographs in burials and in peoples' relationships with the dead. The example above illustrates the often paradoxical nature of such photographs; they can cause great pain, yet they are sometimes necessary and can bring peace and closure to those left behind. In this chapter, I ask why it is so important for some to take photographs of the dead. What do photographs of the dead "do" for those left behind?

There are many ways to answer these questions, but in this chapter, I focus on three reasons for taking death photographs, all of which emerged through the interviews and observations I conducted. First, the most intimate and personal reasons for taking and keeping the photographs concerned the passing on of knowledge and memories to children. Children, who might not remember their deceased parents, grandparents, or siblings, are shown photographs of the dead, and through this medium their older relations hope to help them understand death, and why, for example, their father or mother is no longer a part of their life. Inspired by Bille (2010), this section also concerns the absence felt by children of the deceased and how photographs can affect this absence. Second, showing the children photographs is also part of a larger project, undertaken by the elders of a family. Using the works of scholars like French (2012), Hallam and Hockey (2001), Savelsberg and King (2007), and White (2006), I show that taking pictures of the dead and of funeral ceremonies is part of the creation of a collective memory that is preserved for posterity. I demonstrate how elders use this technology to ensure their authority, both over the dead and over a certain cultural narrative. Third, I delve further into the specifics of how photographs can engender deep feelings in those who behold them, and through these emotional responses obtain some power to influence people's social lives. This is not so much an effect created intentionally by the people, who take the pictures, but rather an underlying consequence. Photographs have, when people interact with them, a kind of social life themselves. Drawing on Michael Flaherty's theories about time and *time work* (2003, 2011, 2012), I especially focus on how photographs can affect the lived experience of the time of mourning and death, and also the future without a deceased loved one.

The empirical foundations of this chapter lie in 12 months of fieldwork in Gulu, conducted between 2011 and 2014. Through numerous interviews, I have gained insight into the ways people relate to photographs and narrated the stories they see in them. Through participant observation at a number of funerals and in people's homes, I observed when and how such pictures were taken, and how people would interact with them in their daily lives, after the funerals.

Background: Of War, Death, and the Visibility of the Dead

The Acholi population makes up around 4.7% of the almost 36 million people living in Uganda today.[3] The political history of Uganda since its independence in 1962, and that of the Acholis' role in it, is complicated and marked by turbulent coups and dictatorial regimes, of which Idi Amin's 1971–1979 rule remains the internationally most notorious. The status of the Acholi population in the country has fluctuated greatly with the changing governments, depending on the ethnic identity of the president of the day (Atkinson 2010, 10–11). Where some were favorable to the Acholi, others, like Amin and to a certain extent the current president Yowri Museveni, in power since 1986, have been less so. When Museveni, a southerner, came to power, rebellion stirred in the North. Several rebel armies were created and a few had minor success (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 8). But it was when a young man named Joseph Kony began recruiting soldiers that the most notorious rebel army was created. In the late 1980s, his army grew and in the early 1990s Kony dubbed his forces the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 10).

The next two decades were ones of violence and general insecurity for the Acholi society. Despite initially claiming to fight *for* the north, the LRA quickly turned against the local population, looting, killing, and maiming (Harlacher et al. 2006). The government forces were also guilty of atrocities as they killed civilians, burnt homes, and looted most of the heads of cattle in the northern regions (Dolan 2009, 44). The war was taking a heavy toll on the civil population, and in 1996 the government's solution to this was to create camps for internally displaced people (IDP camps) (Dolan 2009, 107). Life in the camps offered little respite from the war and as illness and rebel attacks plagued the camps, the ground slowly became filled with the graves of the dead.

It was not until 2006 that a cessation of hostilities agreement was finally signed, raising the hope that the war was coming to an end (Dolan 2009, 57). The final peace agreement remains unsigned by Kony, and the LRA has now moved on to the neighboring countries of South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Atkinson 2010, 323), leaving Uganda in peace. By all accounts, the LRA has now been reduced to a few hundred people. Since 2006, many displaced people in Northern Uganda have moved out of the camps and back to the villages in which they lived before. Gardens are being cultivated again, homes rebuilt, and children sent back to school. Though the process of re-establishing a well-functioning society independent of foreign aid is a struggle, it is now underway.

The war had repercussions on all aspects of life in Acholi, as well as on how death and dying were seen and handled. Most people were intimately affected, losing friends or relations to the rebels, the army, or to illness or malnutrition, and thus death was a constant companion for those living in Northern Uganda. Crucially, though the war created an immediate need to deal with death on a greater scale than before, the conditions of the camps left people unable to do so according to tradition, which resulted in, according to many elders with whom I spoke, a muddling and blurring of traditions and rituals.

Death Rituals in a Changing Society

The dead are highly influential in the lives of many Acholis. The presence of family graves on ancestral land is important as the family should remain gathered both in life and in death. This is not to be understood only as a metaphysical ideal, but a physical and practical one as well; the remains of the dead and the bodies of the living belong on the same land, along with their respective spirits. Thus, graves are almost always placed on the home compound, next to the house. Funerals themselves are vital social occasions where clans and families come together, strengthen social ties, and mourn collectively. Multiple funeral rites are performed, sometimes spanning years, and always with a great number of family members in attendance. The war and subsequent displacement made these customs very difficult to follow as many did not have access to their family land or were divided from their relatives. As the war came to an end, and people started moving out of the camps, the funeral rites were resumed, and even many of those buried in the camps were exhumed and brought home to receive a proper burial.

Peace, however, also created new opportunities for business and travel. People became more mobile, taking jobs in other districts, and marrying further away from their ancestral lands. Ideally, one should attend the funerals of all friends and relations, and not doing so is considered a great affront. Funerals are therefore often very large affairs where several hundreds of people gather to mourn together. But, as people are living further away from their ancestral lands, and as employers are resorting to making rules about how many funerals their employees are allowed to attend each month (personal communication with several employers at NGOs and local businesses), it has become increasingly hard to uphold the traditions of such large funerals. Many people, elders especially, fear that modernization and "Westernization" are ruining old traditions. In this process, where modernization and development are fragmenting the perceived traditional structures of life, photography is one of the tools used to bind people back together. It might seem ironic that a relatively modern piece of technology, ever developing and ever changing, can be used to preserve and maintain old traditions. Nevertheless, photographs are indeed taken in order to document and preserve burial procedures developed through generations. For many years graves have, in Acholi, been the main material tool with which to mediate the dead, but the use of photographs is now emerging as a new instrument for this purpose. De Witte has observed a similar development in Ghana, where the "technologies of remembering the dead" have changed from terracotta figures to photographs. A photograph "transcends boundaries of time and space so as to safeguard [the dead person's] future remembrance" (De Witte 2011, 194, 201), and thus prevents the dead from becoming totally absent.

The Visibility of the Dead

It is a common assumption that people in Africa are generally used to and comfortable with seeing and handling dead bodies, while such intimate interaction with the dead has been largely handed over to institutions and professionals in "Western" countries (Stepputat 2014a). There are, of course, great variations from country to country, and family to family, in how the treatment of the body is handled, and in who is in contact with the body before the burial. Drawing from personal experiences of death in Denmark and death in Uganda, I have seen a significant difference both in who handles the body, and in the levels of visibility of the corpse. In Northern Uganda, hundreds of people often show up for funerals and many are personally and physically involved in preparing the body.

Meanwhile, in Danish society, there is a tendency of "'denying', 'silencing' or even 'ignoring' death, for example by removing dead bodies from the gaze of the living, with the exception of the gazes of a few professionals" (Stepputat 2014a, 3). Though relatives in Denmark might be present at the moment of death, they are often distanced from the subsequent treatment and preparation of the body, and might only see it again when it has been dressed, washed, and laid out by hospital staff. Stepputat writes from a Scandinavian viewpoint, and here open caskets at funerals and death photography are extremely rare. In the United States, however, there is a widespread practice of embalming and putting makeup on the dead so as to make them presentable for viewing. There is also, both in Europe and the United States, a history of "post-mortem portraiture" (Hallam et al. 1999, 35) dating back to the nineteenth century. This practice has declined dramatically in recent years, with the exception of photographs of dead infants and stillborn babies (Bleyen 2010). What nevertheless unites these Western practices is that in the majority of cases most of the physical contact with the dead is handled by professionals, and not by family and friends.

The lack of a system to take care of the dead body might be part of an explanation as to why the visibility of the dead in public is much more common in places like Northern Uganda. The main exception to the reluctance to *see* death in societies such as the Danish is within photojournalism, but it is mostly another kind of dead body on display than one resting peacefully in a coffin. What photojournalism portrays is the war casualty, the hunger victim, or the victim of a natural disaster; strangers from other parts of the world, who become symbols of a conflict or a calamity, and not individuals. Browsing through the winners of the previous years' World Press Photo awards, one can see the bodies of Palestinian children, the rotting corpse of a Sudanese soldier, the victims of Mexican drug wars, and the embracing bodies of two victims of a factory collapse in Bangladesh.[4] While people in Denmark might, at times, take private pictures of their deceased relatives, they are seldom shared with a larger crowd; sorrow is private and the dead body is something which should not be seen by too many. The photographs of the dead in Northern Uganda very much refer to individuals; the pictures carry with them the life story of the person pictured and are used to remember the impact that person had on the lives of the people they knew. Furthermore, they are taken in highly public situations and shared among many people.

The turbulent history of Northern Uganda might make a desire for visual proof of death even more prominent. During the many years of war,

thousands of children and youngsters were abducted and forced to fight for the LRA, many of whom have never returned. As a result, many Northern Ugandans are all too familiar with the pain and terror of not knowing. They are aware that, even though the truth may be devastating, it is often better than living in uncertainty. That awareness may contribute to a need for proof through the medium of photographs.

Helping the Children of the Dead

People often told me that those who had it hardest at the time of a death, and who would struggle with the aftereffects of the death the longest, were the children of the deceased. I therefore focus on them and the part that photography plays in the adults' attempts at helping children through grief, and aiding them to remember. Many children lost parents during the war and are living with other family relatives. Though the war is over, illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and typhoid, as well as accidents and deaths in childbirth, also leave many children without one or both of their parents. Thanks to a tight but large family network, there are often aunts, uncles, grandmothers, or older siblings who step up to become the main caregiver. Such caregivers at times use photographs of a child's dead parent to explain what happened to the parent, what kind of a person he or she was, and help the child toward an acceptance of the parent's death. Additionally, the picture functions as a proof of death. Lanyero, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, keeps the devastating image of herself standing over her husband's dead body holding her son so she can show her son that his father is truly dead. Many children in Northern Uganda grow up with fathers (and mothers) who have abandoned them for another family, for a job somewhere else, or for no obvious reason whatsoever. But, by having this picture and showing it to her son, Lanyero is able to prove that the boy's father did not willingly abandon them to fend for themselves. The story below shows a similar situation, where the photographs of the body of a young father will prove useful in the future.

"He Was Here": The Story of Christopher

Christopher, a 34-year-old teacher who died of tuberculosis, was buried in September 2012, leaving three wives and two children behind. Before he disappeared into the earth forever, his open casket was laid out so the mourners could see him, and several relatives snapped pictures of his

motionless face. When I later asked Samuel, Christopher's cousin, why people took pictures of Christopher's corpse, he answered, "By showing [his children] the pictures of his body it will be introduced to them that he died on this day and that he *was* here." Arguably, such pictures are probably also taken because they *can* be taken. In Uganda, photographs of the dead, mainly murder victims and road casualties, regularly appear on the front pages of newspapers. Standing in line in Gulu's Uchumi supermarket, one is often faced with the front page of *The Red Pepper*, showing the picture of the crumpled remains of a car, a bloody arm hanging absurdly from a smashed window, or of a dead police officer or criminal, gunned down, dark blood congealing on his pallid face. Less spectacular are the articles describing the deaths and burials of prominent people, often accompanied by respectfully staged photographs of the deceased lying in their coffins, surrounded by mourning friends and relatives. Such pictures are examples of the visibility of death in public space in Uganda. The former invites outrage, disgust, and pity, where the latter seems to be an extended version of what other families try to do when they take a picture at a funeral and show it to friends and relations: sharing grief within a certain group. But, no matter the reason for sharing the pictures, it is clear that people have few scruples regarding taking pictures of the dead, and many feel that when you have the technology to do so, it should be used.

When talking to Samuel about these matters, he looked at my digital camera and remarked: "I hope you took yours?", implying that it was a waste for me not to have snapped his dead cousin's picture, now that I had such nice equipment with which to do so. The many images of Christopher, saved on the ever-present mobile phones, provide his relatives with physical proof that he was once a living man. Consequently, they contribute to keeping the social being alive and perhaps attempt to fill the absence that his death will leave in his children's lives.

A picture of the still-living Christopher might also help keep his social being alive, but a picture of his corpse further shows, as his cousin points out, that he died; that his physical body stopped breathing and became the inanimate, waxy entity shown on the mobile phone screen. It begs the questions: Why this need for physical proof? Why this necessity to show the surroundings and the next generation that "he *was* here"? In Acholi, as elsewhere in Africa (Goody 1962; Lamont 2011; Noret 2011), there is a long tradition of the living having to go to great lengths to ensure that the dead are content (Atkinson 2010, 88). Taking pictures of the dead may be

seen as an extension of this practice. "[The pictures] are there to remind you of what happened that day, to let you not forget about the deceased. [. . .] You can't deny the dead," Samuel told me. Taking pictures of the dead sends a signal to the spirits that they are not forgotten. Showing the pictures to the children of the deceased keeps the memory of the dead alive, both in the minds of the children who might not remember and within the family. Christopher's children are so young that they will probably not remember their father. Thus, having photographs of his burial and his body is a great advantage. "They have to see," Samuel continued, "if you hear that your father was there, but you haven't seen and don't remember, you might feel guilty. Especially when others remember." Showing the children pictures of the guests attending the funeral also proves that their father was a good man with many friends.

It can seem curious that pictures taken before a person died may not serve the same function as pictures taken after death, and in some ways, they do. However, pictures of the corpse follow the story to the end, providing the children with further proof that their parent actually died and did not leave them willingly. None of this will, of course, remove the absence they feel due to their missing father, but it might help them to a better understanding and acceptance of what happened to him.

Photographs as Mediations of the Absent and Vessels of Memory

It is impossible to characterize completely the absence a child may feel after the loss of a parent. Depending on the age of the child and the relationship with the parent, the absence may be immediate and acute, or one which grows as the child matures and becomes aware of what he or she is missing. The power of absence lies in its ability to direct attention toward a presence (Bille et al. 2010, 4). When a person is suddenly physically gone, the "hole" left can, in many ways, claim more attention than the person did when he or she was alive. By offering a perfect likeness of the deceased, photographs take this attribute to the extreme. In the case of children who have no memories of a deceased parent, the pictures might remind them of that very absence, the fact that they are so closely connected to a person they cannot remember.

The pictures taken at Acholi funerals are saved and, at times, developed to be displayed in photo albums alongside photos of graduations, past

Christmases, and the like. While it seems that the pictures draw attention to an absence, they also constitute an attempt to "fill" that very absence. Photographs can provide the bereaved with a tool with which to gain control over their own grief as they negotiate the perceived absence of their deceased friend or relative. Later in this chapter, I will delve further into how photographs can affect the experiences of the bereaved in a very real way.

Photographs have the ability to retain memory and thus provide the bereaved with the opportunity to move on in life. Samuel said that children "might feel guilty" if they cannot remember their dead parent. A photograph might at least help them to preserve the memories they have so as to assuage that guilt, and they will furthermore have the knowledge that the memories of their parent will not disappear if they focus on other things for a while. Moreover, a photograph of a corpse preserves the object within the picture in a state of stasis, allowing the mourners to extend the time they have left to say goodbye. Therefore, by bringing camera phones and digital cameras into Acholi burial practices, relatives are assuming a measure of control over their situation, and are able, to some level, to regulate the absences which have emerged.

REPRODUCING THE AUTHORITY OF THE ELDERS: GENERATING FAMILIAL MEMORY THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

When children are shown pictures of their dead parents, it is not only for their own benefit. It is also part of a much larger and more long-term process. The pictures form part of a *collective memory* (Halbwachs 1992; Connerton 1988; French 2012) within a family, a story told across generations about the relative they have lost (French 2012, 338). Collective memory can be defined thus: "knowledge about the past that is shared, mutually acknowledged, and reinforced by a collectivity" (Savelsberg and King 2007, 191). The term "collective memory" usually refers to the memory of larger societies, but here I create a more narrow variation that is *familial memory*. Within families, such knowledge is important in the collective attempt to create and maintain a self-definition as a group. What do we, as a family, stand for? What are our values? What is our history? Who are we? Stories about the feats of ancestors and the accomplishments of deceased parents and grandparents can play a big part in creating a collective familial memory.

The main actors in the creation of familial memory are often the elders of a family. The loss of familial memory and knowledge of rituals and customs is intimately linked with the erosion of what is colloquially called "Acholi culture." This loss is often lamented by people of the elder generations. They regularly blame both "Western" influences and the indifference of the younger generations. Acholi culture, its merits and attributes, is frequently discussed. Its definition seems to cover many aspects of life, such as cooking, songs, gardening methods, myths, and most importantly, rituals. At a funeral ceremony, an elderly man said to me, with a resigned smile: "Your culture is ruining our culture," indicating the huge loudspeakers blasting African pop music as an example. "These," he said, "have replaced the drums we used to play at burials. People are forgetting." Documenting events such as burials, and passing the documentation on to younger generations, is a way to preserve the Acholi culture in years to come.

Inventing a Family History

"How will you use [the pictures of your dead mother] in the future?"
"It is like a history for the young people who will forget. Maybe the small children's generation will change, and they will be able to see what was happening [these] days. They will compare it to their own time."

Atim had lost her mother, Ventorina, a week or so before making these statements. A large funeral was held with hundreds of people coming to accompany her mother on her last journey. She was a highly beloved person within the community and innumerable eulogies were made, all lamenting her loss. Atim had hired photographers to follow the proceedings all the way from the cold room, where her mother's body had been kept, through the funeral ceremony, to the moment when she was lowered into the ground. She was buried near the house in which she had lived for much of her life. Atim planned to produce DVDs for her friends and relatives with the pictures and videos from the funeral and made t-shirts printed with her mother's picture. These were worn by most of Ventorina's children, nieces, and nephews during the ceremony. For her, these artifacts were not only mementos or souvenirs. They formed a *history* within the family.

Ventorina's body was laid out in a coffin in a room in the main house of the compound in which she lived. As the mourners started

arriving, the women closest to Ventorina, her daughters, sisters, and friends, crowded around her coffin. Some brought bright scarves and argued which color scarf to place on the pillow supporting Ventorina's head. When a gold scarf had been decided upon and gently tucked under the dead woman's head, the women proceeded to put makeup on her face—some powder on her cheeks and lip gloss on her lips. They asked me to take pictures of the whole process. When they had finished, they draped a thin piece of lacy fabric over the open coffin, after which the women posed in groups so I could document what they had done. When Ventorina's coffin was opened for viewing during the funeral, hundreds of relatives and friends filed past to pay their last respects. Children too small to reach the coffin were lifted up by mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, so that they too could see Ventorina for themselves. Many took the chance to take pictures of the coffin and of Ventorina inside it (Fig. 6.2). When Atim later described the importance of having these pictures as a part of a history of the family, she elaborated that it was vital to document the whole process of the funeral rites, as they might change in the future. She, like many others in Acholi, worries that Acholi culture is dying out, slowly to be replaced by a more "Western" way of doing things. The preservation of these rituals within the familial memory thus becomes all the more important as they not only concern the immediate family but the generations to come.

The importance of a familial memory seems to be heightened around the time of a death in the family. When asked about the need for photographs in Acholi funerals, almost all people interviewed answered that they are "for memory"; they are to help preserve the memory of a loved one, and perhaps to be used to create new memories. Hallam and Hockey state that "we witness death acting as a deep incentive to remember and the process of dying can give license to intense phases of memory making with all of its attendant material complexity" (Hallam and Hockey 2001, 3). Their use of the phrase "memory making" alludes to a conscious decision to determinedly imprint certain moments onto one's recollections of an event. Thus, the memory of an event also, through photographs, becomes something "created" rather than a slice of reality. A photograph cannot encompass the whole of a situation, and thus the moment the picture is taken, a version of the event is captured, leaving out the rest. This preserved part of a situation will stand more clearly afterward, as one can return to the picture to refresh one's

Fig. 6.2 Women are preparing Ventorina's body for the funeral

memory while other, non-documented moments and memories fall into the background. In her seminal book *On Photography,* Susan Sontag claims that "[t]he photographer is not simply the person who records the past but the one who invents it" (1977, 67). Everyday actions and events surrounding a death gain special significance, because of the exceptional context, to the extent that they can be almost sacred. The collection of photographs gathered after a funeral thus becomes the narrative told to future generations. The process of choosing what to take photographs of, and which pictures to preserve, thus becomes very important as this is when the story of the family is created. That story will then form a part of a family's future identity.

Photographs can thus have an influence on which events come to shape a family identity the most. Sontag claims that "[a]fter the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed" (Sontag 1977, 11). Clearly, much has happened within photography since the 1970s, and her conclusions must be seen in the light of a drastically technologically-changed world. There are also great differences between the society on which Sontag builds her conclusions and Acholi society. Nevertheless, some of her arguments are still relevant in Gulu today. In Gulu, photographs are often still considered something special, certainly in the rural areas, where such luxuries are unaffordable in everyday life. So when a photographer is hired or when a relative brings a camera to an event, this event does indeed become something exceptional. Photographs are in their essence generative; they are creations which themselves create memories of and feelings about a situation, a period in time, or a certain person. Thus, though their subject remains static, they continue to "evolve" in the sense that they continually evoke emotions and thoughts in the people looking at them. This is of course mostly the case with people who are in some way emotionally involved with the subject of the photograph.

But even relations who might not have been around, or alive, at the time when a picture of a deceased person was taken might feel an emotional connection to it. When elders pass these pictures on in the family, it seems to be with a hope that the next generations *will* become emotionally invested in the people and rituals they depict, and thus feel a desire to preserve both the memories and the way of life.

The Perpetuation of the Authority of Elders

I do not claim that the hopes elders invest in pictures of funerals and the dead are entirely altruistic. When passing on stories of important rituals and the accomplishments of ancestors, the elders are also passing on a narrative of a certain way of life and a certain social structure. Much of Acholi society is very gerontocratic in nature; elders are the main decision makers in family matters and should be respected for their age, wisdom, and life experience. Through this influence, the elders exert power over the collective memory-making by narrating their version of past events, and over the way the living should handle, remember, and interact with the dead. Stepputat describes how in Western society the state, as well as certain official institutions, have the "ultimate authority to define and govern the dead" (Stepputat 2014a, 4), and that a time of death creates an opportunity to perform sovereignty and create "domains of power" (Stepputat 2014a, 5). The power to control dead bodies, and thus the transition between life and death, creates what Stepputat calls a "sacralisation of authority" (Stepputat 2014b, 20). Drawing on Bloch and Parry's work on death rites (1982), he shows how funeral rites can confirm "existing authority as stable and legitimate" (Stepputat 2014b, 22), as they reaffirm the fact that the continuance of society is ensured, despite the death of a single individual. Though there is a great diversity within the modes of managing death within so-called Western society, it is a general rule that death has been somewhat removed from the intimate spaces of family relationships, not least in Scandinavia, from whence Finn Stepputat writes.

In Northern Uganda, where the State is almost completely uninvolved in funeral practices, the opportunity for such "intimate governance" is held by the elders (Seebach 2016). By defining the traditions followed, the elders attain authority over the transition between life and death, and thus over one of the most important parts of life. Moreover, when these traditions are documented photographically, it allows for the procedures to be perpetuated, even beyond the time of their own deaths. Thus, though cameras have only recently become widely available, they are being rapidly incorporated into an undertaking to preserve a social structure much older. As stated above, many blame the ever-increasing "Western" influence for the eroding of Acholi culture. Consequently, it can seem slightly ironic that a technology originally introduced by the very "Western" influences to which many elders are averse seem to help people resist these changes and perpetuate the authority of the elders.[5]

The funeral narrative, and within it the narrative of the legitimate authority of the elders, is an essential part of the aforementioned familial memory. French argues that collective memory is about "owning history," which in many ways is what the elders attempt to do in their mission to amass a certain familial memory. Thus, it is not necessarily about truth or objectivity, but about creating a joint history around which to gather as a family, and which can make up a set of guidelines to follow. The past is constructed from a present standpoint (French 2012, 338, 340) and aids to legitimize a current state of affairs. The collective mass of memories generated by a family is constituted both by stories told again and again, objects passed through the generations, and through photographs. As the photographs depict important events in the joint history of a family, such as weddings, graduations, and funerals, they show occasions where the family has gathered to celebrate or mourn as a unit. All these elements emphasize the importance of gathering and supporting each other during hard times. A familial history is ever-present in the back of the minds of the members of a family, and thus also affects decisions made in life as well as how they regard themselves as individuals, and relate to the family and the elders.

Photographs of the deceased stand out in a drastic way from any other photographs a family might possess. They achieve an added potency due to the nature of their subject. The dead body is a powerful object that can affect events long after the death of the individual who "inhabited" it. Verdery describes what she calls the "political lives of dead bodies" (1999). Dead bodies, according to Verdery, are multi-vocal; they can be ascribed a multitude of "virtues, vices, and intentions" (Verdery 1999, 28), and thus they can be used effectively as symbols by those who have the power to control them. The effectiveness of a dead body as a symbol lies not so much in its materiality and concrete presence, but in the associations people have with it. Some of those properties, which a dead body contains, can be transferred to objects which are intimately linked with the dead body, such as relics, graves, and photographs. Contrary to the former, photographs are unique in the way that they are more mobile, cheaper, and more readily available. You can also make more of them and circulate them more widely. When photographs of the dead are used to help children through their grief, or employed by elders in order to preserve an Acholi culture believed to be slipping away, the photographs are, like Verdery's dead bodies, granted a kind of social life. That things have

social lives has been described by, among others, Appadurai (1988). However, where he concentrated on things such as commodities, I here focus on the *emotional* social lives of photographs, and how their influence on people's emotions can affect their social lives.

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE DEAD

So far, this chapter has skirted around one of the most potent properties of photographs of the dead. Due to their capacity to bring back memories, to depict a most trying situation, and to remind people of the ones they lost, or the ones they will never really remember, photographs have an immense power to evoke emotions. Our emotions shape how we relate to the world around us, and thus they shape our social lives. As photographs can influence our emotions and our memories, they come to influence our social lives, and through us gain a kind of social life themselves. Writing about other people's emotional lives is challenging, as it would be presumptuous to assume that what one person feels in a given situation is comparable to what another person might feel in that same situation. Nonetheless, I take the statements made by the people who so generously showed me the pictures and told me the stories of the death of their loved ones to attempt to reach an understanding of how the photographs of the dead have affected them.

The interaction between people and photographs give the photographs a kind of social life, as they influence the lived experience of people, and their perception of the grieving process. They bring back memories, create new memories, and influence the emotions of the bereaved, and thus they are bestowed with a kind of agency.

The Agency of Photographs

Photographs derive agency from the agency of the person they depict. Photographs can give the illusion of "speaking" for the person they refer to, but like Verdery's bodies, they "don't talk much" (1999, 29) in reality. Therefore, they can be used by people who assume control over them and who can thus "speak" for the dead they depict. Therefore, though photographs do not literally have an active agency, they still have the power to influence the social life around them, and thus people's experiences of grief and mourning.

Alonyo, a woman in her sixties, told me that she does feel pain when she looks at the photographs taken at her brother's funeral. Yet still she chooses to keep them:

> Yes, [we took the pictures] for memory. [...] His daughter was small when he died. Now she is grown. She lives in London with her mother, but she came to visit, and she asked for pictures from the burial. She is about 15 years old. She got both a picture of him from the burial and one from when he was alive. The picture of the dead person indicates [our] love for the dead body. The photo is kept in the house, so the child will remember. She will recall him, and take the photo out and look at it. It is a sign of love, of memory.

Her niece, who has been living in London for years and was not present at her father's burial, came to Uganda with her mother. Together, they went to Alonyo's house to claim her copies of her father's pictures. According to Alonyo, this helped the daughter cope with her loss. As she had not been there when her father had died, she had had a hard time dealing with his death that felt somewhat intangible. But having the photographs of her father in his coffin started her on a process of grieving and acceptance. This might also be the case with Christopher, the teacher who died of tuberculosis and left two small children behind. When they grow up and wish to understand what happened to their father, their mother can show them the pictures and tell them the story of his life and death.

Memories, feelings, and other sensations triggered by photographs constitute a presence, which is very real to the person experiencing them. And though they do not transform into the physical presence of the deceased, they do constitute another kind of physical presence; they become proxies. In the same vein, Verdery (1999) describes how a grave can be construed as a surrogate or a substitute for the corpse and obtain some of these same qualities. The social being thus endures within the object. He/she is absorbed into the grave and the grave then provides a means, for the bereaved, of upholding a continuous relationship with the deceased (Hallam and Hockey 2001, 4). While not integrating the physical remains of the deceased, as a grave does, a photograph captures the image of the person and is thus transformed into a kind of proxy—a material object, which has imbibed a fraction of the essence, and agency, of the person it pictures. By providing this material link to the deceased, they might aid in beginning a process of healing and acceptance.

Photographs provide the bereaved with an opportunity to affect their own situation, and strive to master the turbulent emotional landscape in which they find themselves. By being proxies, the photographs are also all the more useful in the mission to preserve Acholi culture. They imbibe an element of the way of life, which the elders are trying to preserve, and thus the elders add to the agency of the deceased person an element of their own agency; they add the "voice" of the dead to their cause.

While the previous sections have been dealing with specific cases and how photographs help children move on and elders preserve Acholi culture, I will now move on to a discussion of how photographs of the dead may affect the grieving process on a more abstract level; that of the experience of the *time* of grieving.

Photography, Grieving, and the Passing of Time

The old saying that "time heals all wounds" might not always be what people in the immediate states of grief want to hear. Yet the connection between time and the experience of grief is nonetheless an interesting one, certainly when it comes to the role of photographs in the grieving process. Inspired by Flaherty's concept of *time work*, I show how photographs can affect the perception of time, and therefore the experience of the grieving process.

Willerslev et al. claim that death "stops us" (Willerslev et al. 2013, 6); it forces us to confront practical and existential matters and problems in life, and ignore more mundane everyday issues. Jackson presents a similar argument when he points out that moments of death (and birth) create what I will call a *temporal bubble* where "[t]ime seems to hang fire, annulled by the overwhelming presence of this one painful event" (2007, 206). So what happens when photographs are introduced into this space of temporal and emotional chaos? Jackson describes that after events such as births or deaths, when we seem removed from the flow of time to which the rest of the world appears to belong, we try to reclaim autonomy over our own lives and experience of time (Jackson 2007, 207). By re-entering the mundane activities of everyday life, we burst the temporal bubble we temporarily inhabited and fall in line with the rest of the world once more.

In Northern Uganda, photographs are becoming a part of this process. A photograph from "within" the temporal bubble, from the funeral itself, or of the body of a deceased person, creates a tangible image of the situation in question. This image itself is an interesting

temporal tool, as it in several ways makes the passing and presence of time evident. First, the photograph itself stops time. It creates a bubble within the bubble and preserves this particular moment for good. This might legitimize that the bereaved start moving on somewhat because they will always have a fragment of this moment to return to. Jackson states that one of the things that keep bereaved within this bubble is the fact that they feel distanced from, and outraged by, the "outside world" and its insistence on proceeding with everyday tasks, despite the fact that this terrible and world-shattering death has occurred (ibid.). Having a photograph from the time of a death might provide mourners with the proof they need, to themselves and others, that though they too are returning to the humdrum of everyday life, they have not forgotten their grief. Second, it gives them the ever-present opportunity to revisit that moment, whenever they need to. Thus a photograph might make it legitimate for the bereaved to begin moving on with life without losing the connection to their deceased relative.

Using Flaherty's concept of time work, the methods people use to manipulate their experience of time's passing (2003, 2011, 2012), the use of photographs to break this temporal bubble can be seen as time work in order to speed up time, or indeed kick start a time which seems to have stalled completely. But time work is also implemented in order to decelerate time in the grieving process. By taking a picture, the photographer makes the moment last longer and provides the bereaved family with more time to say goodbye to their deceased relative. According to Flaherty, one of the ways in which one can make a moment last is by concentrating intently on the here and now (2003, 23). A photograph can be seen as the most potent concentration of this; a "here and now" captured forever, or at least as long as the photograph itself exists. And as long as you have this photograph, you can revisit that moment. Especially in cases concerning children, this feature might be highly useful, as they get the opportunity to revisit memories of their parents through the photographs.

Photographs do not always seem to have a beneficial influence on the grieving process; they can make pain more acute, remind the bereaved of things or people they may not want to think about, and even remind one that death will come to us all in the end. "All photographs are *memento mori*"[6] (Sontag 1977, 15); all photographs have the power to remind one of the passing of time and therefore of the ever-approaching moment when the spectator will also be out of time. Flaherty spells out this blunt realization thus: "The people in every photograph are already dead or

Fig. 6.3 A picture from Mary's photo album. Note the cross on the foreheads of the man standing to the right, and of the child

soon will be" (2012, 97). Photographs of the dead, be they deceased or still alive in the pictures, are a constant reminder that the person in the photograph is no more, and further that the viewer is inevitably going the same way.

This capacity is perhaps most vivid not in the pictures of the dead, but in the photographs shown to me by a woman called Mary (Fig. 6.3). Taking out her family album, she pointed out how she had marked all the deceased people in the pictures by drawing a cross in pen across their foreheads. She did not have pictures of dead bodies, but felt it was very important for her to add that detail, so when other people saw the pictures they would know that these people were no more. This, along with pictures of actual corpses, signals a general need to communicate visually the fact that someone has passed away. The two types of images do and signal different things. Mary's photographs seem to violently brand apparently thriving people with a stamp of death. They are thrust from one

category to another with the stroke of a pen and seem to speak to the viewer of the fickleness of life, whilst keeping alive the social identity of the now deceased (cf. Harper 2010, 114). Contrary to this, the pictures of the dead capture the deceased "[s]uspended in this liminal phase" (Hallam and Hockey 2001, 144) between death and burial. Taking such pictures is a way to "memorialize persons at the final stage in life" and document the last time the living are physically near the deceased (Hallam and Hockey 2001, 154). Thus, photographs of the dead fulfill a distinctly different role than photographs of the same person when he or she was alive, and at times, this might be what is needed.

In a way, the photographs of the dead accentuate the fact that the dead are not only absent in space, but in *time*. When someone dies, especially when it is regarded that they die "before their time," the bereaved are left with a sense of a life cut brutally short, and the eternal speculation on what the deceased might have accomplished in his or her lifetime had they not died. One woman, talking about the pictures of her dead brother, expressed this feeling thus: "I don't want to see the pictures. It brings a lot of memories. It pains me. When I see what kinds of development [he] might have brought if [he] had not died it makes me sad." This woman hides her pictures and only takes them out on special occasions, so as to avoid being confronted with the potential time with her relatives that she has lost.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this chapter, I asked the questions: Why it is so important for some to take photographs of the dead? And what do photographs of the dead "do" for those left behind? Moving from a very personal perspective of children mourning parents and finding comfort and certainty in photographs, to a broader one concerned with familial memory and the preservation of a culture for the future generations, to a more abstract one, pondering the social lives of photographs of the dead, I have provided some answers to these questions, within the scope of my research in Acholi communities in the early twenty-first century.

Death photography is a practice that fulfills needs on several levels in Acholi society. It provides a physical object of remembrance and a material connection to deceased friends and relations. It is especially with children in mind that such photographs are taken, as children are believed to have the hardest time moving on after a death as they not only struggle with the

grief itself, but with the added fear of forgetting. Photographs can be used to manage both the spatial and temporal absence, which a death creates, and they also form part of a joint familial memory, upholding traditions and old social structures by providing images of how things should be. They are tools which can be used in active memory making and become part of a larger process of collective societal remembrance, creating a continuity between the present and a past where rituals and customs were a more important part of everyday life. The familial memory, which is created through photographs, is, as French described, about "owning history" (French 2012, 338). By possessing photographs of family events through time, a family can tell the story of how they became who they are, and how they managed to stay in touch with their roots and ancestors through time, and through the war. The special capacities that are inherent in the medium of photography make it possible to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next, freeing it from the individual. The ways that the photographs affect both the mourning experience of children and the memory making of the elders indicates the varied social life of death photographs. The agency attained through the connection to the deceased person pictured, and through the designs and desires of the people who are in control of it, in turn influences the social lives of the people who interact with the photographs.

There have been many changes in the way people take pictures in recent years, and the world is no longer, as Sontag describes, a place where a photograph is something special, and every photograph has to be thought through, waited for, and developed before you can finally see the magical moment caught on film. Now, many people have camera phones in their pockets all the time, and photographs can be taken without expense, perhaps never to be developed. One photograph can quickly drown in the hundreds or thousands of other photographs that a standard memory card can contain. As mentioned, this development has not yet fully reached Northern Uganda, certainly not the rural parts. But it is happening; most people in Gulu have mobile phones and before long they will have camera phones as well. How will that affect the photographs of the dead? Will they still be as important a part of the familial memory making when they are but one in a thousand photographs, saved on a camera phone? I contend that they will. The change in the attitude toward, and use of, the medium of photography does not change the fact that a corpse in itself is an exceptional motif in so many ways. And though people may relate more casually to the practice

of taking pictures, the dead body as a subject will imbue a photograph with an undeniable presence.

Notes

1. According to the wishes of my informants, I have kept their real names in all cases except for the woman I have chosen to call Mary, as she wished to be anonymous.
2. Most of the interviews in this chapter were conducted with people who spoke Acholi, and in these cases, I used a translator. Only the interview with the woman named Alonyo was in English.
3. It is difficult to obtain precise demographic data on the Ugandan population, but these numbers come from the CIA FactBook (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html, accessed December 12, 2014), based on a 2002 census. I am aware that numbers have probably changed since then, but as of yet, demographic data of Uganda is very hard to find.
4. http://www.worldpressphoto.org/
5. Photography came to East Africa with the colonial explorers, scientists, and engineers building railways in the late 1800s (Behrend 2003; Edwards 2001; Vokes 2008). The technology quickly spread to the African population, however, and it soon became popular to visit photo studios to get portraits taken, for those who had the means (Vokes 2008). Nonetheless, the availability of cameras and camera phones remain scarce for those who live in rural Uganda.
6. Latin. The literal translation is: "Remember (that you have) to die" (Oxford English Dictionary, Third Edition, 2001).

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Mediating Mortality: Transtemporal Illness Blogs and Digital Care Work

Tamara Kneese

How is it that the distinction between subject and object, between me and things, is so crucially dependent on life and death? Why is death the harbinger and index of the thing-world, and how can it be, then, that death awakens life in things?

– Michael Taussig on reading Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* poems, penned just before her suicide (Taussig 2004)

I'm haunted, yes. But it's not all bad.

– Kevin Foley, *Card Blue* blogger

When Lee Ann Cox's husband, Kevin Foley, was too frail to update his popular illness blog, *Card Blue*, Lee Ann posted on his behalf. After his death, she alerted his online community of readers, as well as their loved ones, friends, and social networks, to his passing. The last post, "Kevin Foley: 1979–2009," tells readers that "[c]ancer silenced Kevin's voice on November 19" and points to the strong network of people entangled in this web of illness, dying, and eventual death: "To the people who have come to this site again and again, the strangers who are now friends, the

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people who have left comments of such heartfelt encouragement, the silent but loyal readers, your support has meant so much to Kevin and to me."[1] In an interview with me more than four years after that final post, Lee Ann disclosed that Kevin was not technically dead when she typed these words, but lying in a bed next to her. While she waited to post the message until after he passed, she wrote it before grief and sorrow became impediments to this act of love. Lee Ann inhabited a liminal caregiving space in that moment, straddling the line between supporting a sick and dying husband and carrying out the duties of a widow. She provided physical assistance to a weakened Kevin while also engaging in the maintenance of his blog, both an expression of his present struggles and a potential personal digital archive after his death. Today, his blog offers a space for imagined communication between Lee Ann and Kevin, while also attracting new readers and producing ongoing affective bonds.

Kevin and Lee Ann's story is not uncommon. As Internet use becomes a ubiquitous part of everyday North American life, people are wondering what will happen to their large accumulations of digital possessions after they die. *Communicative traces*, including blogs, email accounts, online banking information, social media profiles, and Second Life avatars, have many possible fates as they are passed down to kin members as digital heirlooms, are deleted or forgotten, take on new contexts and meanings, or live on as before.[2] A number of recent scholarly works have elucidated the various problems with digital remains as potentially public spaces, including interference from interlopers such as spammers, trolls, and grief tourists (Marwick and Ellison 2012; Phillips 2011); arguments over who has the authority to remove content from memorial walls and negotiation over how the dead should be remembered (Brubaker and Hayes 2011; Brubaker et al. 2013); the postmortem privacy rights of the dead (Edwards and Harbinga 2013); and the absence of legal wills regarding digital accounts (Carroll and Romano 2011; Perrone 2013). Digital estate planning companies attempt to handle some of these problems by bequeathing digital account information and passwords to designated surviving kin members, but these companies are often short-lived and most people do not take the time to organize their own digital estates (Banks 2011). Focusing on bequeathing digital possessions to one inheritor also ignores the diverse networks of actors who are tied to individuals' digital remains, including third-party platforms, disparate kin members, various friends and acquaintances, and even strangers who may comment on blogs or social media pages.

Aside from being produced and maintained by a large network of actors, digital possessions are also linked to embodied action and physical infrastructures. Building on the work of anthropologists who have linked digital life to everyday cultural habits and bodily existence (Boellstorff 2008; Horst and Miller 2012), my aim is to connect digital dying and death to material practices over time. The particular technological affordances of digital media – including their supposed immateriality or disembodied qualities, apparent autonomy, networked capabilities, and capacity for reproduction, circulation, and mutation – provide the scaffolding for imagined communications with the dead. But these communications are undergirded by infrastructures and embodied, relational labor. Digital afterlives are more than the belief in an information-based persistence in the ether; rather, they are composed of sometimes contradictory networks of individual kin members and social groups; reliant upon interactions, memory, rituals, and practices, as well as based on changeable infrastructures, platforms, and interfaces; and produced by physical actions and material structures. They are dynamic assemblages consisting of human and non-human actors alike.

In this chapter, I address the complex intersubjective and transtemporal relationships afforded by online spaces. I juxtapose these interactions with the embodied effects of protracted illness and the physical infrastructures required to produce online bonds and sustain digital afterlives. On illness blogs and personal social media pages, the terminally ill imagine their own future postmortem relationships, even fantasizing about how their kin members will survive without them. After a person dies, these blogs or social media pages may then become places for the living to interact with the dead and for mourners to communicate not only with existing social networks, but with a wide range of individuals they know solely in an online context.

On the other hand, physical pain and relational labor produce these imagined worlds, as illness bloggers face day-to-day hardships while living with cancer. Illness bloggers practice self-care, including blogging or other forms of documentation and sharing, while close kin members or health care workers also engage in affective labor. Those closest to the terminally ill person send updates to social networks, post messages dictated by the sick person who can no longer type, or even upload goodbye messages for the dying person after she takes her final breath. This work is often done in tandem with changing bandages or colostomy bags, performing domestic labor, and providing emotional support. Marxist digital media scholars typically think of digital labor as the production of content, or the sharing, linking, or "liking" of others'

posts (Berardi 2009; Lovink 2012; Scholz 2012), but what about the backend labor?[3] What of the affective labor required to maintain, repair, facilitate, and interact with others' digital possessions, particularly those of dying or deceased kin members? This chapter traces the networked production of individuals' social media pages and blogs, examining the potential long-term effects of these kinds of digital possessions as they become sites for transtemporal and postmortem communication.

Analyzing the process of turning individuals' dynamic illness narratives into interactive digital heirlooms helps to reconfigure notions of self versus network, private versus public, material versus virtual, and life versus death. Illness blogs and other social media forms documenting disease and treatment can act as extensions of the self, providing the scaffolding for imagined long-term futures in the face of immediate physical suffering and possible death. After an individual dies, these sites allow mourners to connect with the past, to communicate with the deceased, and to form new social relationships. But digital remains are complicated kinds of inheritances and may unintentionally burden the recipient, or may have unforeseen consequences, taking on additional meanings over time. Here, I argue that digital remains are a form of "inalienable possession" (Weiner 1992), an iteration of "intersubjective spacetime" (Munn 1986) and a kind of "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg 2004), shattering temporal boundaries and facilitating networked subjectivity, where many actors contribute to the production and maintenance of a singular person's digital identity.

First, I outline my methods, a combination of archival and ethnographic research. I then describe the problems caused by intersubjective blogs. One person ostensibly authors an illness blog or controls a social networking page, but multiple people may comment on and interact with the site. Furthermore, non-human actors such as third-party platforms, particular hardware, and interfaces structure these relationships. Next, I position computer-based imaginaries in relation to transtemporal social networks, demonstrating how the dying and their caregivers use digital media to express themselves, form bonds, and document their affective or existential positions. I examine the ways the dying imagine their own digital afterlives versus what happens to their accounts after they die. After this, I discuss the potential ambivalence associated with physical care work, detailing how embodied care work for the sick or dying intersects with caring for loved ones' digital possessions. In this section, I examine what caring for digital remains actually entails, and how this labor is bound up in feelings of guilt and exhaustion as well as consolation.

Then I show how these attributes of digital remains liken them to inalienable possessions and act as a manifestation of prosthetic memory and intersubjective spacetime. Finally, I provide a brief summary and gesture toward spaces for further research.

Methods

This chapter is based on qualitative interviews with 12 individuals of various ages who are currently maintaining their deceased kin members' digital possessions or who are still connected to social networks fomented by a loved one's illness and/or death. I conducted some interviews in person (n = 3), but I conducted most of them over the phone or Skype because my informants are geographically dispersed. All of the informants quoted in this chapter are Canadian or American, and all of them currently live in North America. Subjects were either directly contacted because they are public figures or were found through email and social media blasts, or through posts on cancer discussion websites like CancerCompass. While many of my interview subjects happen to be widows, people of any gender can be both physical and digital caretakers. Furthermore, my definition of "kin" members who are connected to these transtemporal rituals includes not only blood relatives or close family members like siblings or parents, but extended networks of friends, lovers, and colleagues. All interviews were conducted in English. In addition to interviews, this work is also based on close readings of the maintained illness blogs of the dead and other digital materials such as tweets, Facebook pages, audio recordings, published articles, and photographs.

This chapter also emerges from 7 years' worth of related research and interviews as part of a longer dissertation project. Throughout the dissertation as a whole, I draw on semi-structured interviews with digital mourners and digital estate planners alike, short-term fieldwork at various sites in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland (Oregon), and Seattle, discourse analysis, web ethnography, participant observation, and archival research in order to provide a holistic and historically oriented portrait of digital death.

Rather than viewing this as strictly a web ethnography, I instead refer to this project as a form of "network anthropology" as described by Jenna Burrell (2009). I aim to examine the digital afterlife as a constellation of interactions, belief systems, and structures of obligation. Digital afterlives are not sequestered on websites, but have traction in everyday embodied life. Like Burrell, my "field site is a network composed of fixed and moving

points including spaces, people, and objects" (2009: 189). I cannot directly observe the imagined interactions that people have with the dead through various digital means, but I can learn more about their imagined interactions through the interview process and through multimedia textual analysis.

As Joseph Reagle recently wrote in an essay for *Ethnography Matters*, there is need for a "historically informed digital ethnography" (2014). When reading online archives composed of email logs and blogs, should this be defined as historical or ethnographic practice? "And at what point, in trawling through online archives, does ethnography become history? (When the sources are dead?)"[4] From my position as a researcher of the digital possessions of the dead, this seems like an especially pressing question as the lines between interview and archive blur. Throughout the duration of my research, many of the webpages and links I refer to have disappeared, with my screenshots and quotations acting as the only record. In this way, the slippage between ethnographic and historical practice occurs when non-human actors disappear as well as when human interlocutors die. Furthermore, the robust digital afterlives of illness bloggers necessitate treating these dynamic blogs and social media spaces as active subjects, not just as historical records. Death, then, is not a proper metric for setting boundaries between historical and ethnographic research methods.

Intersubjective Illness Blogs

While one person usually authors a blog, blogs are actually collaborative spaces. Multiple readers and commenters, as well as the particular protocols of third-party platforms, contribute to their production. This is especially evident when it comes to the blogs of the terminally ill and the dead, as kin members may physically provide assistance or post on behalf of the sick or dead person. Caregivers may even interject their own voices into the blog in order to communicate with a wider audience of readers.

This phenomenon coincides with Hélène Mialet's definition of a "distributed-centered subject" (2012). She refers to Stephen Hawking as such because the deleterious effects of his ALS make him physically dependent on a wide variety of actors. The entire cluster of things, including "machines, the assistants, Hawking himself, the students, the colleague, the diagrams, the journalists, the articles, the movies and the books, my

own presence, the archivists, the architecture of the city, the archives, the statue) that constitute Stephen Hawking – that is, constitute his presence: make it durable, extend it, and conversely point back to him, which is to say singularize him at the same time they allow him to think, act, or be present" (Mialet 2012, 9). Stephen Hawking is reified as a lone genius at the same time he is actually a combination of machines, other bodies, and other brains that allow him to persist and to do his work. This paradox is mirrored in the intersubjective workings of illness blogs, where one person's digital possession in fact exists and survives thanks to the actions of many actors, even as this collective labor serves to reinforce the notion that a blog is an emanation of the sick, dying, or deceased subject.

Third-party platforms are major actors in this configuration. As many media scholars have noted, digital media have particular ramifications because of their reproducibility and malleability, or "programmability" (Manovich 2001), accessibility, in that they can be viewed from anywhere and from multiple locations at once (Christen 2005), collective singular presence as information (Kittler 1999) and their relationship with omnipresent, overlapping screens (Friedberg 2006). Consequently, there are considerable differences between inheriting tangible objects and digital forms of property. Because the same devices and platforms host banal interactions alongside the most personal and potentially sentimental communications, spam folders residing next to both love letters and bank statements, a person's digital estate must be taken as a whole. Assets like Facebook accounts encapsulate social relationships over time, so one estate must be preserved concurrently with kin members' digital estates; it is challenging to extricate one Facebook page and preserve it as an isolated, static heirloom. Not only do digital assets rely on these networks of social relationships, they also depend on third-party platforms for existence. This fact raises many legal questions over what technically constitutes a decedent's property. Instead of family members bickering over jewelry and silverware, kin members of the deceased may find themselves battling corporations like Facebook or Google for rights to their loved one's assets.

For example, John Woods was a college senior at the time of the Virginia Tech shootings in April 2007. After his girlfriend, Maxine Turner, was killed, John and other friends and family members of the shooting victims tried to prevent Facebook from removing the profiles of the dead, which was Facebook's policy at the time. While most people's profiles continued on as before, the victims' names were well publicized

and Facebook therefore decided to remove their profiles after 30 days. Thanks to grassroots efforts by John and others, Facebook ultimately left the profiles instead of deleting them.[5] Seven years later, John still visits Max's Facebook page to look at their photographs together and remember their shared history. Because of Facebook's changing interface, Max's profile contains photographs but not "like" pages or any of the newer features added since 2007. Also as a result of Facebook's changing interface, all of the Virginia Tech shooting victims' profile photos are now questions marks. Despite these marks of age and noticeable differences from active Facebook accounts, John says that the persistence of her profile has been a source of comfort and stability in his life: "It's been a rock to me."[6] However, if Facebook decides to alter the page, Facebook disappears as an entity, or if Max's family decides to delete the page, John may lose his anchor.

There are now anxious discourses regarding control over and ownership of these materials because digital data is always potentially public as well as persistent. Unlike a letter shoved in a drawer and forgotten for 40 years, numerous people, regardless of kinship or affiliation and from any geographic location, may access a blog or Facebook profile. Digital assets are also endlessly reproducible and thus may be bequeathed to many individuals, meaning that their value does not lie in their inimitability. Information deleted on one platform or website may appear on another, making it difficult to effectively erase digital traces. Online reputations are difficult to manage during life and are even harder to control after death. In an infamous case, the photograph of Rehtaeh Parsons, a Canadian teenager who committed suicide, was used in a dating website's advertisement on Facebook, without the knowledge or consent of her family (Goel 2013).

Unlike paper ephemera, online possessions are open to public or at least semi-public view, depending on privacy settings. While even private diaries are in some ways intended for certain publics, the affordances of online platforms allow for much wider circulation across geographic, temporal, and spatial barriers (Van Dijck 2007). José Van Dijck examines the life blogs of Alzheimer's patients, who used these platforms as ways of preparing for death or disconnection but also as a means of forming bonds with other patients who may read the blog and link to it on their own websites. It is both an act of writing to oneself and writing to and for others. Mediated memories are used "for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others" (Van Dijck 2007, 21).

Blogging is embodied, networked labor. It is about the desire to self-document as well as to connect other entities.

Kevin Foley, mentioned in the introduction, started his blog as a way of finding other patients with his rare form of sarcoma (Card Blue 2009). Through blogging, both he and Lee Ann Cox became virtually connected to other families struggling with the disease, even if they did not physically meet. In an email correspondence with me, Lee Ann mentioned her connection to Josh Isaac, a sarcoma blogger from Seattle, and his wife, Kim: "Kim and I are were particularly intimate between Kevin's death and Josh's and for a while after, though we never met" (email correspondence with the author, May 29, 2014). Lee Ann and Kevin also read other sarcoma blogs together. She writes that visiting *Lemmon Drops*, the blog of Emilie Lemmons, a Minnesota woman who developed soft tissue sarcoma while pregnant with her second son, "still totally makes me cry, quite a powerful digital afterlife – I vividly remember wrapping presents before Christmas when Kevin came in to tell me Emilie had died. Very strange to feel heartbroken over someone you've never met" (email correspondence with the author, May 29, 2014). Lee Ann also developed relationships with the people who commented on Kevin's blog, particularly after she took up the work of replying to them. For instance, one woman shared a heartfelt email Kevin had written to her about her daughter's death from cancer. While these interactions took place exclusively online, they are connected to specific physical actions and material memories in Lee Ann's mind.

While Kevin blogged, Lee Ann took to Twitter in an attempt to find a sense of community. Lee Ann has some reservations about shifting her thoughts from a private journal to public tweets, asking herself "Why am I exposing myself in this way?" She is torn, however, stating that "when you look at how private and uncomfortable we are as a society about death, I didn't feel that or experience it. I wanted to put it out there. I think it's good for the people who are experiencing it, those on the sidelines going through it." Along with expressing her own feelings about caretaking and widowhood, Lee Ann hopes to show others experiencing the same things that they are not alone. Elsewhere, I have argued that while individuals are bombarded by grisly images of death and destruction in the news, they are less comfortable with postings about death on social media, particularly images of cancer scars, sincere sentiments about loss, or graphic depictions of illness in people they know (Kneese 2014). Despite the taboo of talking about personal experiences with illness and death in public online spaces,

those who are struggling with illness and death find solace in documenting their experiences and in sharing their hardships with those who are going through the same ordeal.

The public or semi-public nature of digital communications about illness and death means that not all readers are personally close to the posters. One result of the complexities of networked relationships inform-ing public digital interactions is that only those "in the know" are aware that an illness blog's sudden silence is an indicator of debilitation, remis-sion, or death. If a loved one does not take the pains to interject her own voice on the blog of a cancer patient, readers may not know if the patient is alive or dead. It is common for illness bloggers to stop blogging during remission, focusing instead on resuming normal everyday routines or no longer blogging because their connection with readers was contingent upon the existence of cancer (McCosker and Darcy 2013, 1280). One informant, Pamela, described this thorny process in relation to her friend Sarah's battle with breast cancer and her eventual death. When Sarah's illness blog fell silent, her friend Lisa, who is a breast cancer survivor, assumed that Sarah was in remission and enjoying life, no longer focused on being sick. Those in Sarah and her husband George's inner circle of friends and family, however, knew that Sarah was undergoing radiation treatment after her cancer metastasized and spread to her brain. She stopped updating her blog when she became too ill to do so. Those who were aware of Sarah's worsening condition posted photographs of her on Facebook, sometimes accompanied by encouraging messages. Pamela, a close friend of Sarah's, was particularly visible in her social media postings. As a result, acquaintances who were unsure of Sarah's status privately Facebook messaged Pamela for updates. Different reactions to Sarah's silence on her blog and the posting of photographs indicate the complex-ity of social networks when it comes to illness. Posting photographs of a healthy, smiling Sarah was an encoded act on the part of her close-knit network, only understood by close family and friends. For those on the outskirts of this core network, the meaning was unclear and they sought out an explanation.

Complex networks are negotiated as control over information deter-mines who is a close kin member and who is merely an acquaintance. There are different levels of being in the know, including the status of a sick person or knowing how a person died, or if they died at all. In some cases, as in the one mentioned above, this ambiguity is purposeful. Social media researchers Alice Marwick and danah boyd refer to "context

collapse" induced by social networking websites, as individuals place a wide variety of friends, acquaintances, family members, former lovers, and colleagues, into the blanket category of Facebook friend or Twitter follower (Marwick and boyd 2010). In order to negotiate relationships in this complex environment, individuals may use "social stenography" in order to encode messages intended for specific audiences while casual onlookers will be confused or misrecognize the actual meaning of the post (boyd and Marwick 2011).

In addition to encoding messages, some informants talked about leaving potentially harmful or hurtful things unsaid. Lee Ann and Kevin read each other's posts, even as they adhered to separate platforms. Because of this knowledge, Lee Ann modified her own posts. Instead of expressing her bitterness upon seeing the strawberry flavored condoms at the pharmacy when picking up her ailing husband's medication, for example, she instead tweeted about the insensitivity of the pharmacist and her embarrassment at crying in public. She did not want to publicly call attention to her sadness over the loss of their sex life because of Kevin's illness. Likewise, Kevin knew that Lee Ann read his blog and posted accordingly: "It's Kevin talking to me. Once he couldn't work anymore, he would post something and I would read it in my office. I would know more intimately what was going on in his head." While both Kevin and Lee Ann wrote for wider audiences and for self-documentation purposes, they also used their writing as a way to communicate as a married couple.

In some cases, individuals purposefully obfuscate or completely hide the status of a sick loved one. One informant, Sam, a Canadian woman who is currently maintaining her deceased brother Peter's digital remains, highlights this phenomenon.[7] Sam's sister-in-law was, according to Sam, "mentally unbalanced" and actively trying to take custody of Natalie, Peter's daughter, away from Peter. In order to hide information from his estranged wife, Sam made the updates about Peter's health private on Facebook and did not publicly release general updates on his status. Peter's wife managed to find the IndieGogo page that was being used to raise money for Natalie's future since it was online and publicly visible. His wife obtained a court order saying that the family was using Natalie to pander and forced them to remove Natalie's name and likeness from the page.

Sam started a private Facebook group called "In Peter's Corner" in order to hide it from Peter's wife. She also deleted any references to Peter's condition or the fact that he had Stage IV cancer. While this

Facebook group was private, a number of friends and family members were invited to join the page, even if they were not especially close to Sam and Peter. Sam noted that some "annoying people" posted frequently, which Sam perceived as their way of pretending they were closer to the situation than they were or looking for attention: "here's my asshole cousin." While scrolling through the members of the group and looking at their posts, Sam notes that she "doesn't even know most of these people." Because some individuals are not actually close to Sam's immediate family and may not have heard about Peter's death, it is unclear if everyone who posts to the page knows Peter is dead. Sam notes that one commenter in particular is speaking to Peter as if he were still living. If no one explicitly posts about a person's death, it is possible that the person will continue to be perceived as alive. This ambiguous status can lead to misunderstandings and uncomfortable situations on social media pages and in face-to-face meetings.

When the person dies, the family members may post on the blog, which before only appeared to contain the thoughts of the dying person. When Sarah became too sick from undergoing metastasized breast cancer treatments to post to her blog, her husband, George, posted "A husband's update" to her blog, alerting her readers to the fact that she had moved to hospice care after radiation treatment had failed to slow her stage IV cancer. When she passed away, George posted again, providing details about her memorial service and describing the last days of her life. While the comments on the blog had before been addressed to Sarah, the new comments were addressed to George. George then answered many of these comments, which contained memories of Sarah's life. He expressed his thanks for the messages and said that they would constitute a kind of digital heirloom for George and Sarah's son. Similarly, Sam also posted many updates on her brother's behalf. On his main Facebook page she provided information about his health status and, months after his death, gave everyone details about his memorial service. Surviving kin members may feel a sense of responsibility and obligation to alert readers when a cancer blogger or active social media user dies, causing them to interject their own voices on behalf of their now silent loved ones. In some cases, the dying individual may ask his or her close kin members to upload a final message. For instance, Emilie Lemmons had her husband upload a quote by the twentieth-century American writer Raymond Carver after her death. This is the last entry on her now preserved illness blog.

In some cases, family members may actively take over the blog, not preserving it as a static heirloom but continuing to add to it in a dynamic way. In a well-known case, film critic Roger Ebert's widow, Chaz, promised to post to his Twitter and Facebook pages after his death in order to continue connecting with his many followers (Kleeman 2014). Blogs and social networking profiles are interactive spaces when the person is alive and after he or she is dead: on blogs, for instance, there are often spaces for comments. The surviving kin members may answer comments after the person dies or may field private email messages about the blog. Alice Pyne was a British teenager with terminal cancer who created the blog *Alice's Bucket List* (2015) to document cancer treatments as well as her attempts to fulfill the items on her bucket list, or the things she wanted to do before she died. When she passed away at age 17, her mother Vicky and sister Milly continued to update her blog. On the 1-year anniversary of her death, Milly wrote a post called "A Year Without Alice." Milly writes about going to the Coppermines Cottages in Coniston in her sister's honor, but also mentions her weekends volunteering at Oxfam and her anxieties about her upcoming exams. While the blog is still *Alice's Bucket List* and Alice's header and description persist, Milly added her voice to Alice's narrative, posting in her absence.

Social media is inherently interactive and collaborative, but this intensifies when someone is dying and becomes even more apparent after someone's death. Mourning kin members may contribute their own voices to dying or dead loved ones' blogs or other social media pages to varying degrees. The whole network is embroiled in an individual's death, but competing interests may necessitate demonstrations of insider knowledge and encoded messages, leading to uncomfortable or ambiguous moments. Many ethical questions regarding ownership, authority, and privacy manifest when one individual's blog or social media page is revealed to be the work of a complex network.

TRANSTEMPORAL IMAGINARIES

The dying and those caring for them may have different ways of documenting their experiences, using separate media platforms and imagining distinct potential audiences. Those who are sick or dying may blog about their treatments, physical pain, or may simply relay anecdotes from daily family life. They may also imagine possible futures without their presence, even picturing themselves as spirits or ghosts. While their loved ones may use

social media to document their own experiences before the person dies, they use both their own archives and the digital remains of the dead individual to mark time, to mourn, and to connect with the deceased. The dying person imagines the future, whereas the mourner connects to the past.

Emilie Lemmons blogged about her feelings regarding her own mortality, imagining how her family would cope without her and using a romantic comedy as a way of accessing that possibility:

> I have had moments when I just want to stop all treatment and lie down and let nature take its course. And of course, that makes me feel like a bad mother, a bad wife . . . . But then I watch a silly-sweet movie like *The Holiday* where Jude Law is a widower with two young girls, and he finds love with Cameron Diaz after thinking he'll never find love again, and it gives me this naive hope that maybe things will work out without me, that maybe I don't need to be so resistant to dying, if that's what the cards hold for me. (*Lemmon Drops* 2008)

While Emilie underwent treatments and hoped for the best, she also imagined her loved ones' lives without her.[8] Her blog, *Lemmon Drops*, was a means of connecting with other cancer patients and of expressing her feelings about her experiences, but it was simultaneously a form of *momento mori*. Now that Emilie has died, her blog persists as digital archive of her relationship to her own mortality as well as to her kin members.

This juxtaposition emerges on other illness blogs as well. Kevin Foley began *Card Blue* in 2008, 16 months after his sarcoma diagnosis:

> A while ago I began finding occasions to quote an aphorism to my wife and kids. "The best time to have planted an oak tree is 25 years ago. The second best time is today." . . . I wanted to start writing after the first biopsy, then the second, then the CT scan and the PET scan and the MRI, after the first chemo and then the second, after all of the many hospitalizations and the dozens of radiation treatments and now, tenuously, after beginning to feel like a diminished but somewhat whole version of myself.
>
> I did write morose letters for my children, and occasionally funny e-mails to my friends, but I didn't keep a journal of my illness. But the agony of facing this test makes me want to put something down. In some ways, it feels beside the point. It's so late; so much has already happened. But I'm just going to go ahead and plant the damn tree today.

His blog posts detail the effects of his illness on his body, his fears about his own possible death, and the pain and frustration that come when living with a metastasized cancer.[9] At other times, he writes about his family, sharing funny anecdotes from daily life. While he is writing, he is self-consciously aware of his legacy, in the form of his sarcoma activism, his children, and his blog. As he writes, his focus is on documentation and preservation for the future, making his tree metaphor poignantly apt.

Kevin, like Emilie, imagines his family's life without him. After he realized he would eventually die from sarcoma, Kevin had "fantasies in which the story did not end, in which part of me remained to watch and help my wife and children as they made their way through life. I couldn't- can't- bear to imagine them going through the struggle without me, so I would sometimes catch myself conjuring ghost stories in my day dreams." Picturing himself as a ghost became a source of comfort because, in this way, Kevin could remain part of his family's life, even after his physiological death.

In another earlier entry, Kevin resurrects the planting metaphor from his blog's first entry. Rather than likening blogging to planting a tree, in this instance he mentions bulb planting. This is not just metaphorical, however, as he refers to planting physical tulip bulbs in the backyard, knowing that he might be dead by the time they bloom. He regrets not being able to visit a number of famous restaurants, start new writing projects, or see the bulbs he wants to plant, but he views both his blog and the bulbs as an investment in a future he won't actually see. He ends by saying "Last (for now), but not least: This year, damn it, I am going to plant some bulbs. I'm haunted, yes. But it's not all bad." He feels as if he is haunted because he inhabits a liminal space between his imagined ghostly future and his day-to-day existence as a cancer patient. His current actions, like planting or writing, connect him to the time after his death. Kevin believes that the dying must also care for the living: "we must ease regrets, soothe hurts, and build bulwarks of memory and love to offer some protection against the terrible, pressing absence ahead." In his case, Kevin views both bulbs that he physically plants in the ground and his blog as something to provide his family with love even after he is physically gone.

The knowledge of impending death can alter how individuals utilize social media, as the terminally ill may use Facebook, blogs, and other platforms as a way of saying goodbye to their network while caretakers may continue to post updates to family and friends. Sam discussed her brother Peter's Facebook Notes about dying.[10] While he was a "macho guy" before his diagnosis with colorectal cancer, he wrote a series of

messages to his Facebook friends about the meaning of life, memories of good times with friends, and even one note called "prayer" despite his atheist upbringing.

While Sam was actively involved in physically taking care of Peter and monitored Peter's Facebook page when he became too ill to post, Sam did not post about Peter's illness and eventual death on her personal Facebook page. Sam instead kept a private journal tracking funny, light, or "bittersweet" moments during the difficult period, but she did not make these thoughts publicly available. So while Sam and Peter both used the same platform to update and manage their social networks, they used it for very different purposes.

For those who are caring for sick loved ones, considering the future is not a top priority as they focus on the immediate practical tasks at hand. Lee Ann describes this feeling of being in crisis mode. For those who are caretakers of the sick and dying, social media may offer a different outlet, documenting the experiences of one who fears being left behind and providing a means of dealing with ongoing stress. While Kevin blogged extensively about his physical pain, often including graphic descriptions, Lee Ann writes about pain's ability to divide them. Kevin could blog about his pain as a means of sharing it, but Lee Ann could not experience it directly. Not only was Lee Ann separated from Kevin's experiences because of his physical pain, but she was also separated by her sense of preparing for widowhood, what she refers to as "widow rehearsal."

Mourning loved ones may use social media to document their frustration and exhaustion, or their fears of losing their loved ones. After the death of a loved one, they may then reread their own documentation as well as the documentation of the deceased in order to feel a sense of connection. Mourning through tweets or other forms of public writing isn't necessarily a form of therapy, but yet another form of documentation. Lee Ann told me, "I don't think it's therapeutic. As an Iraqi poet on NPR said: it's not medicine, it's an x-ray. It doesn't heal . . . My reason for living for a long time was to fight cancer . . . Even if that was exhausting, that was what I did. And all of a sudden he was gone." Now, years after his death, she often revisits his blog. One a week after his death, she tweeted "Lying in bed, reading Kevin's blog, wishing I could make Thanksgiving go away and him come back."[11] In August 2010, she tweeted about celebrating their 10-year wedding anniversary without Kevin there and in September 2010, she celebrated what would have been his 39th birthday.[12] Now, Kevin's blog provides Lee Ann with a way of connecting with him, while

her Twitter feed is a way of marking time and documenting her mourning. While long-term illness and death separated them, the traces of their different experiences still serve as connection points.

During the caretaking process and in the immediate aftermath of a loved one's death, social media and blogs may serve as outlets and as ways of communicating with kin networks and wider publics, providing practical information such as health-related updates or memorial service information. After a death, however, the digital traces left behind may take on new meanings and become heirlooms rather than tools. Surviving loved ones may have long-term, complex relationships with these digital remains. While Lee Ann now has a new partner, she still revisits Kevin's blog and tweets about him frequently. Even years after a person's death, digital remains may persist. While Kevin detailed his experiences with an eye toward the future, imagining his blog as a kind of tree, Lee Ann now uses the blog to revisit the past and to feel connected to him. Along with rereading his blog, she also replays the MP3 file of his memorial service, now another part of Kevin's personal digital archive. In addition to these digital connections, Lee Ann and other family members and friends planted the bulbs Kevin wanted to see bloom. She tweets about planting bulbs soon after his death. Lee Ann and other people who were close to Kevin helped to actualize his desire to plant bulbs, using both his blog and the physical bulbs as a means of connecting to him. Lee Ann directly associates the eventual flowers that will come with Kevin, saying that "we'll see him in the spring" when the bulbs bloom.

For Lee Ann, it is crucial that *Card Blue* stay online and that people continue to read it. Lee Ann wrote two articles about Kevin's death for *Salon* (Cox 2012, 2013). After the second article was published on *Salon*'s website, a reader commented on the story to say how much she enjoyed reading *Card Blue*. The reader found Kevin's blog after reading Lee Ann's story. Although Kevin had been dead for years, Lee Ann's article allowed this woman to discover Kevin's blog and connect with Lee Ann. She tweeted about her positive experience with the new reader.

As mentioned in the previous section, spouses and other close kin members often post final messages on illness blogs in order to inform readers that the sick individual has died. In this moment, the page changes from a dynamic public journal to an archive. But this archive is maintained thanks to a wide network of actors and produces ongoing relationships. For instance, Sam describes the fact that many people continue to tag Peter in photos and various locations on Facebook, even tagging him at

his own funeral. Digital afterlives may lead to new affective bonds, or may help to strengthen and perpetuate existing ones. Lee Ann also tweets about her ongoing relationships with the families of other sarcoma patients. In one tweet, she talks about the death of Josh Isaac, who passed away roughly a year after Kevin did. She says that the "connection with Josh & Kim is unaccountable grace." In her subsequent tweet, Lee Ann talks about celebrating her 10-year anniversary to Kevin by herself, drinking a bottle of wine they bought together on a trip to Italy. Through these intersubjective and transtemporal interactions, Lee Ann and Kevin both remain connected to a wide variety of actors, allowing Kevin's digital afterlife to go on long after his physical death.

As Robert Pogue Harrison has noted, "the dead carry on a secular afterlife" in many spaces next to the living, including "graves, homes, laws, words, images, dreams, rituals, monuments, and the archives of literature..." (2005, x). The public, networked nature of the blog or social networking profile heightens this sense of connection with the dead. Because of the complicated networks that determine how digital remains persist, and the material and embodied work that goes into their care, digital afterlives are connected to longer histories of communicating with dead loved ones.

Just as non-computerized ways of mourning the dead persist into the twenty-first century, older "new" media forms also affected conceptions of death, mourning, and temporality. New forms of media, whether in the nineteenth century or today, complicate boundaries between life and death, human and inanimate, material and immaterial, embodied and disembodied, thus becoming a catalyst for both utopian and dystopian fantasies regarding changing social and cultural life. Various media scholars have noted how the continued presence of the dead seemed especially possible with the birth of electronic media in the nineteenth century and again with the advent of cybernetic technologies (Bukatman 1993; Kittler 1999; McGarry 2008; Peters 1999; Sconce 2000). Disembodied communication through telegraphy and telephony made contact with supernatural realms seem more plausible. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the photograph has served as a constant reminder of death (Barthes 2010; Batchen 2004; Ruby 1995). Mourning wives and mothers used spiritual mediums to contact dead soldiers after the Civil War and World War I, sometimes receiving automatic telegrams from dead loved ones (Bourke 2007).

Facebook profiles and other digital remains like preserved illness blogs take this a step further, as prolonged contact with the dead takes place on a platform used in everyday life, not requiring the presence of a professional

spirit medium to lead a séance. Digital mourners may feel that they are somehow reaching their loved ones more or less directly through a familiar medium. Unforeseen encounters with digital remains can spark an affective moment or an experience of *punctum*, much like Barthes' description of encountering a childhood photograph of his recently deceased mother in *Camera Lucida* (2010). Instead of experiencing this connection through a photograph or, in the case of some Victorian mourners, a piece of a dead loved one's hair or other material relic, it may be through an unremembered YouTube video or a fragmentary MP3 file.[13]

The role of automated systems and governing algorithms can create a sense of supernatural contact. While people in a wide variety of human cultures have used various media forms to communicate with the dead, including spirit mediums, phonographs, dreams, and letters, third-party platforms can make the dead appear to respond, or to initiate communication with the living. In a recent article in *The Atlantic*, Julie Bunton describes the uncanny feeling of reading a Facebook message from her deceased best friend. Thanks to a shift in Facebook's messaging system's interface, the message appeared to her as a chat message, making it seem like Lea, her dead friend, was attempting to contact her (Bunton 2014). Digital interactions with the dead can be alarming or comforting, depending on the context. While Lee Ann notes that reading Kevin's blog is comforting, this is very different from when Facebook prompts her to "[h]elp him find his friends" or when his last blog post appeared as the sole thing in her email inbox after a glitch in her workplace's email system.

Because of the algorithmic workings of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, or Gmail, systems do not automatically distinguish between living and dead users. Mourners may feel as though they cannot control interactions with digital remains, as prompts from these services may serve as unwanted reminders of the loss of their loved ones. The emotional response and uncanny feeling provoked by digital remains is embodied, but also deeply networked, connected to relationships with human and non-human actors alike.

EMBODIED AMBIVALENCE AND DIGITAL CARE WORK

Digital caretaking is often connected to other embodied and material tasks associated with illness and death. Caring for dead loved ones' digital remains can be a burden as well as a source of comfort. Digital activities interact with material duties to the sick and dying, as well as other

considerations after a person dies, including wills, what to do with possessions like books, clothing, or other personal items, and plans for memorial and funeral services. In this section, I will discuss the materiality and embodiment inherent to affective labor and care work and the ways in which this physicality carries over into caring for digital remains. I will also outline the ways that exhaustion and frustration lead to caregivers' ambivalence, both about physical care work and the maintenance of digital possessions. The duty of gathering a dead loved one's passwords or capturing and saving their digital photograph library is yet another task to be completed after distributing or keeping a dead loved one's clothing, records, and book collection. The feminist literature on relational labor is especially poignant here in that affective labor is highly ambivalent. An act of love can also be a burden.

Many theorists have discussed the role of affective or "immaterial" labor in the late capitalist economy. Instead of producing goods in the industrial-age Fordist factory, we are now in a global post-Fordist, or post-industrial, era (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Muehlebach 2011). Within this new economic system, workers engage in immaterial (Lazzarato 1996), digital (Scholz 2012, Tiqqun 2010; Wark 2004), flexible and affective (Gregg 2011), free (Terranova 2004), and semiotic (Berardi 2009) forms of labor rather than producing tangible goods. According to this logic, if much work is now done at the computer, relying on code or information instead of on paper documents, then labor itself has become immaterial or digitized. This argument tends to ignore the infrastructures and overseas factories that actually produce electronics, as well as the embodied aspects of digital labor itself.

Feminist theorists have criticized the autonomist Marxist definition of affective and immaterial labor as these ways of portraying labor, have to do more with the end product than the relational aspect of their exchange and production. Nick Dyer-Witherford (2001) claims that autonomist Marxist theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri focus too much on the cyborg worker and not enough on affective and embodied labor. Their analysis did not start with daycare workers or other service employees, but rather attempted to incorporate them into their analysis after the fact. Kathi Weeks (2007) argues that even Marxist scholars often ignore embodiment in their assessment of affective labor. Similarly, Monique Lanoix notes that Hardt and Negri claim that affective labor is material, but "they nonetheless frame it as a disembodied activity" (2013, 91).

Feminist Marxist theorists often use care labor, whether paid or unpaid, as a way of reinserting materiality and embodiment into discussions of post-Fordist labor. Lanoix discusses care work as "embodied practice," calling it "deeply relational" (2013, 86). Care work requires a relationship between two subjects. Not only is much of a hospital worker's labor physical, changing bandages or helping a patient eat, drink, or use the bathroom, but even the worker's reaction to the work is embodied. Perhaps the worker will be "repulsed, sad, or happy; whatever the reaction, it will be felt and transmuted into a bodily way of being" (Lanoix 2013, 95). In this way, there is a power relationship at play when caretakers interact with patients. Lanoix notes that her husband lives at an assisted care facility after sustaining a traumatic brain injury, but that the labor provided by the paid hospital staff is qualitatively different from the labor she enacts: "It is not only that they provide care that I cannot. It is also the fact that I have a relationship with him that predates his head injury, and I have chosen to continue our relationship" (2013, 94).

However, some of the literature around care work speaks to the ambivalence inherent to this kind of labor, whether paid or not. While Some theories of care work focus on its low wages and relationship to stereotypes of feminine nurturing or the concept of the care worker as a "prisoner of love" because workers may be motivated to work for low wages for altruistic reasons (England 2005, 396). Care for the self can also be a form of relational labor, but this is complicated by stereotypes about feminine nurturing tendencies, which can be applied to male or female identified caregivers alike. Gayle Sulik examines breast cancer patients' care for the self, as they undergo treatment and try to maintain their health, as a form of care work. Care work for others, not care for the self, is perceived as a natural condition of women's empathic capacities. These aspects are seen as two contradictory and conflicting things, so women with breast cancer must balance care for others with self-care (Sulik 2007). Interactions between patients and caregivers, or even relationships that patients have with themselves, are undergirded by market valuations of affective forms of labor, notions of what feminized labor should look like, and the relational interactions of overworked, underpaid caregivers or patients who are physically exhausted but must still care for other loved ones.

Illness blogs and other social media pages are spaces where this type of relational, ambivalent labor manifests. Anthony McCosker and Raya Darcy explicitly link illness blogs with affective and communicative labor,

including care for the self and others. They claim that "[b]log tools offer their users (and authors and readers) a continually renewable capacity to produce, express, and connect with others, while also undertaking the often all-encompassing and highly intimate emotional, physical, and relational management associated with their illness" (2013, 1267). They link this work to autonomist Marxist theorists of immaterial and post-Fordist labor. They argue, however, that cancer blogging is outside of commercializing and political forces. "We emphasize firstly that online immaterial labour is site-specific and there is a need to examine the activities, motivations and the physical and affective investment involved in maintaining a blog while living with cancer, in order to situate the personal and social value of online production" (Anthony and Darcy 2013, 1267–1268). Because of the tendency for North American and British cultures to view public discussions of illness and death as taboo, the dying often feel as though they are silenced. They are often frustrated by the discomfort of those who are healthy. Cancer bloggers may use their blogs to vocalize frustration, pain, and other everyday struggles with illness (Anthony and Darcy 2013, 1277). For many cancer bloggers, the material and embodied effects of illness and the work of childcare or other aspects of everyday life impact and are intimately tied to the work of blogging itself.

While these studies emphasize the embodied labor associated with illness blogging, this work also carries over to the physical work of caretaking. Both the kind of relational labor described by Lanoix and Sulik intersect with the relational aspects of illness blogging as depicted by McCosker and Darcy within the context of digital remains. After the patient and caretaker use social media platforms to document and share their experiences, the caretaker eventually assumes the responsibility of maintaining the illness blog, turning it into an interactive archive.

Digital care work, much like physical care work, is a complicated kind of obligation; individuals may feel bound by duty to perform the work, but they may derive pleasure from it while simultaneously viewing it as a kind of burden. Sam, for instance, is in charge of capturing and preserving all of Peter's digital photographs. Peter wrote some messages for his daughter and set them aside for her, so she wonders why didn't he also gather his digital belongings for her. She is annoyed by this, asking "why didn't he do it himself? He knew he was dying." Sam is conflicted about her role as Peter's digital legacy curator. On the one hand, she is bound by duty and feels guilty, saying that she "should probably get on that" in reference to collecting all of his digital possessions and putting them in one location.

On the other hand, she says she is "sort of bitter" that she is the one responsible for this. Sam is also faced with having to capture the digital messages that Peter and his estranged wife wrote each other before their relationship fell apart. She is capturing this discourse so Natalie can make her own decisions regarding her parents' marriage and so she can see that they didn't always have a contentious relationship. Sam is charged with maintaining painful parts of her family's past in order to secure future memories for her niece.

Not only does Sam experience some ambivalence about her new duties as a caretaker of digital remains, she also experiences Peter's digital remains as material remnants. Sam explicitly linked caring for her brother during his illness to caring for his digital remains after his death. In the same breath, she said that she changed Peter's "colostomy bags when he was alive and took care of his digital possessions after he died." Sam described her life caring for Peter when he received at-home hospice, changing his diapers and a whole "range of intimate things, from giving someone a password to seeing my brother's penis." She keeps the photographs from his memorial service on a USB key that she keeps on a keychain in her wallet. She also has many of Peter's physical possessions in her apartment. For instance, some of his clothing is in her closet and his physical possessions are generally integrated with hers.

Taking care of loved ones' digital remains has an inherently material component in that domain names and other infrastructural matters require payment and upkeep. Aidrie Miller, the widow of another well-known illness blogger named Derek K. Miller, spoke on a South By Southwest panel in Austin, Texas in March 2012.[14] Evan Carroll, cofounder of the digital afterlife blog called *The Digital Beyond*, chaired a panel titled "Digital Immortals: Preserving Life Beyond Death." Carroll invited Airdrie to speak on the panel because she uploaded Derek's final blog post after his death from cancer. Derek's last post subsequently went viral and became so popular that it crashed the server in May 2011. Airdrie took charge of maintaining Derek's digital legacy, especially his blog, *Penmachine* (2001).[15] She received calls from GoDaddy, a large company that owns thousands of domain names, about his expiring domain name and the hundreds of dollars she owed them for missed payments. Before his death, it hadn't even occurred to Airdrie that this would be a part of her digital caretaking duties. Lee Ann Cox has a similar story about maintaining *Card Blue*. Lee Ann never canceled Kevin's American Express card and then she noticed a charge from GoDaddy, but she

didn't know what that was: "They explained that he had registered *Card Blue* as a domain name. It was the first time that it had come up for renewal and I paid it. I said I'll pay whatever it is." While both Airdrie and Lee Ann were somewhat active on Twitter, they did not have blogs of their own and did not know that agreeing to take care of their dead husbands' blogs also required paying GoDaddy a monthly fee.

Airdrie expressed her ambivalence about maintaining *Penmachine*. Only Aidrie knows the passwords to these accounts, so she wonders what will happen after she dies, or if anyone will care. Despite these new duties, life goes on after the death of a partner. Airdrie is now on Match. com and starting to date again. On the South By Southwest panel, some other speakers discussed the possibility of turning dead loved ones into holograms, or of using digital remains to allow the dead to achieve a kind of physical immortality. Aidrie wonders what would happen in this futuristic scenario. If there were a robotic or holographic version of Derek, would she just put him in the closet when she went on a date? Would it be improper to turn him off or put him in a closet?[16]

Airdrie explicitly refers to digital care work as a burden. She says, "In a way, I feel like I've been burdened with this long term chore now, to keep his digital life there." Airdrie argues that digital remains are different from physical ones. She has received prompts from Twitter asking her to follow Derek, which she finds upsetting. While his Twitter account may send these reminders, she was able to place the urn with his ashes in a cupboard after she felt "haunted" by having it on the mantel. Now, she can choose to open the cupboard and say hi to Derek's ashes. She would like to have this same amount of control over Derek's digital remains.

Lee Ann also mentions the ambivalence inherent to the kind of care work that long-term illness requires. By the end of his 4-year illness, Lee Ann was exhausted. She wrote about her experiences so that others would know that "if you feel this way, it is understandable." She sometimes thought, "Is he ever going to die?" out of sheer frustration. These thoughts often led her to feel guilty, even though she is aware that many caretakers experience similarly ambivalent emotions.

Now that Kevin is gone, Lee Ann sometimes feels guilty that she is not doing more to maintain his digital afterlife: "What am I not doing that I should be doing? I am a terrible caretaker." She hasn't memorialized his Facebook page, but people still post on his Facebook page from time to time. Lee Ann herself posts on the anniversary of his death or on his

birthday. Kevin's Facebook account is "out there and active. It has occurred to me that it's a problem. Have I been a lousy caretaker? Do people know he's died and have they tried to friend him?" As for his Twitter account, "it must just be sitting there." While she has continued to pay for the domain name for *Card Blue*, Lee Ann feels anxiety over the other aspects of his digital afterlife that she has not paid close attention to. The guilt she feels in regard to his digital remains is similar to the guilt and emotional distress she felt while taking care of him during his protracted illness.

Kevin didn't leave explicit directions for his blog, but left Lee Ann the password and a list of emails to tell people that he had died. Lee Ann says, "I wrote that last post when he was still alive and he was still in the room. I wanted to have it ready to post when he died because there were so many people watching." In the middle of taking care of her dying husband, she also considered her digital duties, feeling bound by obligation to have something posted as soon as he died. She says that is felt like an honor, not a burden. The process was a melancholy one, but she hopes that it "did justice to him. It was a privilege." Caring for digital remains is a material, embodied practice, most certainly a form of labor even if it is also an act of love, undergirded by structures of obligation and kinship ties bound by affective bonds. Just as caregivers of terminally ill patients can feel exhausted and ambivalent, the keepers of digital remains may feel equally so.

NETWORKED REMAINS

The bonds and obligations of kin-based care and complicated social networks extend from everyday life into everyday death. Embodied kin relations and overlapping complicated networks undergird these ghostly digital encounters. Networked technologies and their output, both in terms of digital possessions and social relationships, expose the ways that subjectivity has always been networked and multiple. The uncanny nature of seemingly autonomous digital movements of the dead is in part due to the networked nature of subjectivity and objects in the first place. In the late nineteenth century, Emile Durkheim (1997) noted that "collective consciousness" is greater than the sum of individual minds within a particular society. Subjectivity is formed through social relationships, whether online or off. Likewise, digital and tangible objects alike are always reliant upon networks, relationships, and recognition.

The interactive, algorithmically determined nature of social media means that separating the living from the dead is a difficult process. Being prompted to follow your dead spouse on Twitter, for example, or to remember dead loved ones through other automated, algorithmically determined systems means that interactions with kin members during life take place on the same platforms and interfaces after death.

In this way, the notion of the prosthetic is a helpful analytic when considering the tensions between the individual and the collective or the physical and the imagined when it comes to digital death. I do not mean to imply that prosthetic here stands in for the human-machine hybrid or the cyborg subject. I also do not mean to use prosthetic in a purely metaphorical sense. Rather, for those who are bound up in the physically debilitating effects of long-term or terminal illness, or in the process of performing care work on behalf of the dying, blogs and other social forums provide a way of extending beyond the physical self. In some cases, when a sick individual is too unwell to post or circulate information to their network, a caregiver will post on his or her behalf, acting as a literal prosthetic.

Alison Landsberg argues that "prosthetic memories are neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience" (Landsberg 2004, 19). The subject is able to feel an emotional connection to a historical event that they did not actually experience, which in turn can shape their subjectivity and even their politics. Blogs, especially illness blogs and social media pages belonging to the terminally ill, are extensions of the self or even a form of appendage. They allow for intersubjectivity even after physiological death. Intersubjective illness blogs and digital heirlooms in general are thus a form of social prosthetic. This social prosthetic mediates between the individual and the collective, the past and the future, the virtual and the material, and even the living and the dead, producing a notion of shared experience and understanding.

Nancy Munn's definition of intersubjective spacetime in *The Fame of Gawa* is also a helpful tool when thinking about the ways that digital remains coincide with other transtemporal mechanisms of exchange. Munn defines intersubjective spacetime as

> a multidimensional, symbolic order and process – a spacetime of self-other relations constituted in terms of and by means of specific types of practice. A given type of act or practice forms a spatiotemporal practice, a particular mode of spacetime. Defined abstractly, the specific spatiotemporal features

of this process consist of relations, such as those of distance, location (including geographical domains of space), directionality; duration or continuance, succession, timing (including temporal coordination and relative speed of activities), and so forth. (1986, 10)

Intersubjective spacetime has the ability to extend beyond the individual subject. Through exchange, sets of values and modes of valuation are transferred or negotiated across generations. The ritual exchange of digital remains forms intersubjective and affective bonds, bridging disparate individuals and temporal boundaries. Imagined communication across space and time is a constitutive aspect of digital afterlives, as well as the invisible cellular workings of illnesses themselves, the electricity pulsing through computer systems, and the affective relationships individuals have with certain platforms and interfaces.

Munn describes the symbolic and suprasensible qualities of Kula exchange rings, which points to the ghostly or metaphysical forces in both digital and tangible objects. As Bill Brown has also argued, objects assert themselves as things, "hovering over the threshold between the nameable and unnnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable" (2004, 5). Objects also go beyond utility or materiality in their force as "a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems" (Brown 2004, 5). Writing and even psychological phenomena themselves are already untranslatable traces or Bergsonian virtualities. All objects, not just digital ones, are thus haunted, liminal, ghostly, party immaterial, going back to Marx's commodity fetish, Marcel Mauss's depiction of *mana,* or Freud's fetish object.

Annette Weiner's definition of "inalienable possessions" is also helpful when considering the implications of inheriting digital remains and maintaining the digital afterlives of dead loved ones. They "do not just control the dimensions of giving, their historicities retain for the future, memories, either fabricated or not, of the past. Not always attainable, keeping some things transcendent and out of circulation in the face of the pressures to give them to others is a burden, a responsibility, and at best, a skillful achievement" (Weiner 1992, 7). Weiner goes on to say, "[e]ven though permanence for all time is an impossibility, individuals and groups work with exacting care to recreate the past for the present so that what they do in the present affects the future" (Weiner 1992, 7). In the face of constant decay, chaos, and change, "keeping-while-giving" reveals a "need to

secure permanence in a serial world that is always subject to loss and decay" (Weiner 1992, 7). Objects that are marked as heirlooms, that is, objects that are taken out of circulation and passed across generations, are a means of preserving the past and connecting it to the future despite the fact that all objects, both digital and tangible, are ephemeral. These inalienable possessions, however, allow for collective social identity to be maintained over time (Weiner 1992, 11). Weiner notes how the burden of receiving an inalienable possession may have unforeseen negative consequences for the recipient. It is through these cycles of inheritance, after all, that hierarchies are reproduced and that the social reproduction of the status quo occurs. The burden of receiving such special objects may in some ways counteract the benefits.

CONCLUSION

Digital afterlives are tied to in-person encounters and embodied care work, both in terms of caring for the sick and dying or memorializing the dead, as well as through the physical work of typing, blogging, and posting messages to a wider public. Because digital afterlives are connected to kinship structures, physical interactions, and imagined networks, they are sometimes highly fraught. The digital traces alone do not tell the whole story, as much information is controlled and limited to a select number of close kin members, blood relatives or not, who are physically present or who receive targeted messages. Digital mourning requires embodied care work and may foment new kinds of social interactions within networked groups, sometimes leading to conflicts or negotiations between disparate kin members. Digital afterlives are produced by ongoing, shifting, and contradictory material relationships between human and non-human actors over time.

One key theme that emerges from this chapter is the question of authority over mediated mortality: what should be deleted or maintained and who makes these decisions? While family members are often given jurisdiction over loved ones' digital possessions, third-party platforms may ultimately decide whether or not certain digital assets are passed down as heirlooms. If Facebook fails as an enterprise, then many thousands of Facebook memorial pages will disappear with the company. Digital afterlives rely on the affective labor of the living to persist, as well as on particular media interfaces, platforms, corporations, and associated cultural practices; in this way, ephemerality and obsolescence raise other concerns about the material nature of

digital remains.[17] Many disparate groups interact with social media memorial pages, including friends, family, acquaintances, lovers, and even strangers, meaning that a particular individual's death can bring together new social networks that have never before met in person, raising questions about who should be in control of the deceased person's legacy. In addition to continuing to pay for loved ones' domain names, maintaining their blogs, removing spam messages from their memorial walls, handling online banking information, and keeping up with their mounting emails, kin members may also have to negotiate with the deceased individual's wider social networks and with major companies like Google, Facebook, PayPal, or GoDaddy.

This is by no means an exhaustive narrative of digital afterlives, their complexities, materialities, imaginaries, and potentialities. More long-term fieldwork and interviews are needed, helping to examine the effects of digital afterlives over years and decades, how they change contextual meanings across temporal space. What will happen when some platforms fall away and others persist? As technology changes, will these digital afterlives still be accessible and remembered? Another possible methodological intervention would be to interview terminal cancer patients who use social media, tracking them as they undergo treatment and documenting their mediated relationships with kin networks before and during the dying process and after their deaths. Given the ethical concerns associated with such work, this project would need to be handled with great sensitivity. Tracing these longer personal histories, however, may capture a more holistic kind of digital life and afterlife, showing how networks and relations formed in life, both online and offline, continue after death.

Notes

1. *Card Blue* (http://www.cardblueblog.com/) was Kevin Foley's blog that he maintained until his death in November 2009. Now, it persists as a static digital heirloom, although Lee Ann Cox notes that new readers, many of them cancer patients or survivors, are attracted by it and sometimes contact her. Lee Ann posted the final entry on November 19, 2009, the date of Kevin's death. The "Weak as a kitten" entry was posted on September 2, 2009, one of the last posts before Kevin's death.

2. In my dissertation, I detail the rise of the digital estate and the formation of digital estate planning as a field. Digital "assets" are defined as any digital object of financial or sentimental value that individuals view as their works or property. When they die, they may want to bequeath these materials to loved ones and render them digital heirlooms. The blog *The Digital Beyond*

(http://www.thedigitalbeyond.com/) lists a number of digital estate planning sites, which promise to organize individuals' passwords and final wishes regarding their digital possessions and then allow them to bequeath them to kin members. Also see Richard Banks, *The Future of Looking Back* (2011) for more on the relationship between tangible and digital heirlooms.

3. Marxist theories of immaterial and digital labor will be discussed later in the chapter, but for an excellent overview of Marxist critiques of digital labor, see *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (2012), edited by Trebor Scholz.

4. Joseph Reagle, "Verklempt: Historically Informed Digital Ethnography," Ethnography Matters, 6/10/2014 http://ethnographymatters.net/blog/2014/06/10/verklempt-historically-informed-digital-ethnography/, accessed July 22, 2014.

5. A *USA Today* article from 2007 provides more information about Facebook's memorialization policy and the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shootings. Monica Hortobagyi, "Slain Students' Pages to Stay on Facebook," http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/webguide/internetlife/2007-05-08-facebook-vatech_n.htm, accessed July 22, 2014.

6. I interviewed John Woods on May 14, 2014, over the phone. While his deceased girlfriend died suddenly and did not have an illness blog, his story is pertinent because his ongoing relationship with her profile has changed over time and is dependent on the decisions of Facebook as well as Maxine's family members. As her boyfriend, he does not have any legal right to the page. Although she has been dead for 7 years, she continues to have an active digital afterlife and was even part of a viral tweet that Woods wrote in May 2014, after the Isa Vista shootings. He tweeted about his girlfriend being the victim of a shooting, linking to a photograph of him holding Max's portrait.

7. I interviewed Sam on June 4, 2014 over Skype. Through screensharing, I was able to view her brother's Facebook messages and other posts about his memorial.

8. *Lemmon Drops*, http://lemmondrops.blogspot.com/, accessed July 22, 2014. Emilie posted about living with sarcoma and two young boys until her death in December 2008. Her husband, Stephen, posted a last entry on December 24, 2008, to tell readers that she had passed away.

9. *Card Blue*, http://www.cardblueblog.com/, accessed July 22, 2014.

10. The names of some subjects have been changed. I have also refrained from providing links to some websites or blogs and have tried to withhold as much personal information as possible if informants expressed concerns about confidentiality and anonymity.

11. Lee Ann Cox's Twitter account, tweet from November 26, 2009, https://twitter.com/leeanncox, accessed July 22, 2014

12. Ibid.

13. I have written about postmortem photography and other Victorian mourning practices in relation to contemporary digital mourning rituals elsewhere. See "Death Stares," in *The New Inquiry*, March 18, 2014, http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/death-stares/, accessed July 22, 2014.
14. South By Southwest (SXSW) is an annual tech and music festival held in Austin, Texas.
15. *Penmachine*, http://www.penmachine.com/, accessed July 22, 2014. Derek Miller's last post is the final entry on the blog. Aidrie Miller, his wife, uploaded the final message after his death.
16. The name of the panel at SXSW was "Digital Immortals: Preserving Life Beyond Death" and took place on March 11, 2012. The entire panel was recorded and can be replayed here: http://schedule.sxsw.com/2012/events/event_IAP9715, accessed July 22, 2014.
17. This chapter will not focus on matters of obsolescence, but this chapter is part of a longer dissertation project that considers the tensions between ephemerality and persistence in the context of digital remains.

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Individual, Choice, and Identity

Agency and the Personalization of the Grave in Japan

Sébastien Penmellen Boret

It's strange to think that you are burying yourself!

– Tree burial subscriber

Most anthropological approaches have considered mortuary practices as a means of understanding a society's response to the death of an individual (Hertz 1907; Bloch and Parry 1982; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Robben 2004).[1] Such approaches generally assume that memorialization and associated rituals for the dead are performed by and for the living. However, a few studies, at least in England and Japan, report on funeral and burial forms whereby people participate in devising the celebration and representation of their own death (Jupp 2006; Clayden et al. 2010; Kawano 2010; Rowe 2003; Suzuki 2013). For these individuals, this

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217

process begins several years or sometimes decades prior to their death. In such cases, death is not only the predicament of society, but also an opportunity for their people to represent and negotiate their own identities and express one's values in life.

This chapter proposes to examine the implications of people's agency over their own death rites by examining the new practice of tree burial in contemporary Japanese society.[2] In Japan, the conventional way of death is the ancestral grave and Buddhist mortuary rituals. This system places emphasis on the identity and continuity of a household upon and to which the individual identity of the deceased is dependent and subject. In contrast to the family tomb, we observe the advent of non-ancestral burial systems. These systems include individual/couples' graves (Tsuji 2002), associative or collective tombstones (Rowe 2003, 2011), the scattering of human remains at sea or in a mountain (Kawano 2010), and more recently, tree burial (Boret 2012, 2014). Although their ideas and practices vary considerably, these modes of burial have all done away with household identity and continuity as the basis of their systems. They require neither successors to maintain and inherit the tombstone nor shared family bonds between those buried in the grave.

The development of non-ancestral grave systems in Japan relates to changing socio-demographic conditions including a diversification of household structures, record-low birth rates, a declining number of marriages, and the aging of society (Kawano 2010; Rowe 2011; Boret 2012, 2014; Danely 2014). Without suggesting a direct or deterministic correlation, I found that these conditions concur with the fact that many tree burial subscribers must or choose to renounce the conventional ancestral grave system because they lack a successor necessary to perpetuate a generational grave, do not want to impose a family grave upon their children, resent the costs of such a grave, or/and simply refuse to enter the grave of their household because of family conflicts or personal choice.

If socio-demographic conditions are contributing factors, they alone do not explain the implications of people's choice of their representation of death. In order to examine these issues, this chapter addresses the following questions: (1) Having done away with the filial identity symbolized at ancestral tombs, what is the basis for and process of memorializing the deceased's identities at such non-ancestral graves? (2) Considering the element of choice in subscribing to tree burial, are non-ancestral burial systems symptomatic of changing ideas and representations of post-mortem

identity and social relationships among a section of the Japanese society? (3) And finally, are these non-family modes of burial part of a process of increased individualization of the deceased?

In attempt to answer these questions, this chapter draws on my ethnographic research about novel Japanese death practices, including two years of fieldwork among the community of the first tree burial cemetery established in Japan. The section "From Ancestral Graves to Tree Burial" of this chapter discusses the development and particularities of tree burial. In particular, I compare the basic characteristics of tree burial with the precepts of the ancestral grave and other new non-ancestral graves. The following section on "Negotiating Post-Mortem Identities" presents several case studies of memorialization practices, including (1) married women who purchase a grave as a means of obtaining what scholars have named a "posthumous divorce" (Rowe 2003, 111); (2) subscribers who wish to celebrate their conjugal relationships; and (3) the bereaved who seemingly memorialize the identity of a single individual. The final section introducing the concept of "People's Own Grave" concludes with a discussion on the significance of tree burial within the wider context of Japanese mortuary practices. It draws on Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's critique of individualization in Western societies to problematize people's notion of "choice" of grave. It shows how people are both constrained by society's representations of death, making them instruments of changing ideas about death and memorialization, as well as active agents in creating these new practices. In order to capture people's increased agency over the personalization of the grave, I propose to refer to tree burials, and possibly other non-ancestral grave systems, as "people's own grave." The emphasis on grave ownership not only personalizes a burial space at tree burial but also constitutes a general trend toward the reappropriation of the representation of death in Japan.

From Ancestral Graves to Tree Burial

The conventional mode of disposing of the dead is the ancestral grave. According to this system, each household (*ie*) is expected to possess a family grave where the remains and spirits of the ancestors are respectively buried and pacified through the performance of mortuary rites. The individuals buried in the ancestral grave are the heads of the household and their spouses. The other members (i.e., other siblings), who do not succeed to becoming household head, should enter an ancestral grave of their own; a man is expected to establish his own household and

generational tombstone while a woman should marry in another household and thus should enter the grave of her family-in-law.

An ancestral grave represents the identity of a household and its members. Although its shape and design are diverse, the most visible feature of a family grave is the name of the household written in large characters on the front of the tombstone. The façade of the monument is also frequently adorned with one or several engravings of the family crest. In contrast to these family markers, the names of the individual members buried and venerated at the grave are written in small characters at the back or on the side of the headstone. Such a representation reinforces the idea that the identity of each individual is bound to and secondary to that of his/her household.

The second main function of the ancestral grave system is the representation and maintenance of the continuity of Japanese households. When the head of a household retires or dies, the new head (ideally a son or son-in-law) inherits the grave and becomes responsible for the funeral of the previous head, the maintenance of the family grave, and the performance of rituals toward the ancestors, which will often be carried out by his wife. Moreover, the new head is responsible for providing his own successor to the household grave. If he fails to do so, the ancestors of one's household will have no successor to care for their spirits.

Japanese individuals who do not enter an ancestral grave and/or are not the object of ritual care are classified as unrelated spirits (*muenbotoke*). The remains of these people are usually placed in communal ossuaries before being buried in a common burial ground, both specially reserved for *muenbotoke*. Their spirits are said to be sad and lonely for, unlike ancestors, their living family members do not ritually pacify them. In a perpetual state of bewilderment, unrelated spirits are said to be feared by and potentially harmful to the living. In social terms, this category of spirits can be conceived of as a sanction befalling those who have failed to achieve the ideal of the family system and enter an ancestral grave. At this level, the negative stigma of *muenbotoke* encourages people to avoid becoming a spirit without care and instead maintain and perpetuate the ancestral grave system.

New Non-Ancestral Grave Systems

Since the 1990s, the conventional family tombstone is no longer the only culturally acceptable way of disposing of the dead body. Scholars have reported on new forms of burial systems that are not based upon

the idea of a continuing household. One of these burial forms is known as eternal graves (*eitai kuyōbo*) (Rowe 2011). For a nominal fee, cemetery operators provide and maintain a grave that houses the remains of a single individual, a couple, friends, or a family. In addition, the cemetery operators ensure the performance of mortuary rituals for their spirits. Although they are qualified as "eternal," the period during which mortuary rites are performed for the deceased is limited to usually 30 or 50 years, sufficient time for the spirits to be pacified (*jōbutsu*), the idea of becoming a Buddha or reaching Nirvana.

In addition to eternal graves, we observe the development of associative or communal graves. One of these systems was established in the center of Tokyo by an organization known as Moyai no Kai. This association was established with the personal support of a former governor of Tokyo (1979–1995), Suzuki Shunichi. Since its creation in April 1987, the bodily remains of 2,900 members have been disposed of in their large communal grave. Each of the surrounding walls is inscribed with the 12,000 names of the living and deceased members of the association. In order to create new bonds (distinct from family bonds), the members form leisure clubs that highlight each individual's personal interests, such as history, painting, or cuisine. Each club organizes monthly memorial services for their fellow members who are deceased. As a result, people create small communities before as well as after death. In contrast to ancestral graves, collective graves celebrate the identities of individuals, couples, friends, etc. Only those who have chosen this mode of memorialization while alive may be interred there. As will be discussed in the subsequent sections, the act of *choosing one's death* (e.g., funeral and burial methods), together with new ideas of bonds, are certainly among the most distinctive changes in contemporary Japanese mortuary practices.

In addition to eternal and associative graves, scholars have reported the development of a most unorthodox practice: natural burial (*shizensō*). In 1991, The Soso Japan Society, an association for the freedom of burial, performed for the first time in Japan the scattering of human remains at sea during a short non-religious ceremony. Since its establishment, the scattering of ashes in the ocean or on mountains has become relatively popular across Japan. The Society had attracted over 15,000 members as of 2011 and many funeral companies now offer to their clientele the possibility of scattering the remains of the dead. Despite its doing away with any form of physical grave (other than the presence of the sea or mountains themselves), the staff now records the location of ash-scattering in order to

provide the bereaved with the opportunity to return to the site of scattering and perform memorials for the dead. According to a recent governmental survey, the national approval of the scattering of ashes rose from 20% in 1990 to 74% in 1998 (Rowe 2003; Kawano 2010).

The Creation of Tree Burial

The trend of non-ancestral grave systems contributed to the creation of tree burial (*jumokusō*). This practice took root in Northern Japan, where a Zen Buddhist temple opened the first tree burial cemetery in 1999. The cemetery is a mountainous woodland of 20,000 hectares surrounded by a countryside of farmland and rice paddies (see Fig. 8.1). The inner slopes of the forest are connected by a network of woodchip paths, which not only give the visitors easy access to the graves but also prevent them from treading on and damaging the roots of trees, wild flowers and other vegetation. Each tree burial grave is a 1-meter wide circle. The cremated remains of the deceased are disposed directly into the earth, beneath the

Fig. 8.1 Outer view of the tree burial cemetery: Its mountain and surrounding paddy fields and vegetable gardens

Fig. 8.2 Inner view of the tree burial cemetery: A grave composed of a tree, a wooden tablet on the left, and the network of footpaths

roots of a tree. The type of tree is chosen by the subscribers from the 21 native species selected by the temple; it can be planted prior to or after the burial ceremony. In addition to the tree, the grave is marked by one or several wooden tablets upon which is inscribed the names of the deceased (Fig. 8.2).

To date, the temple has buried the remains of over 600 individuals, contracted more than 2,000 subscribers, and opened 3 additional cemeteries. The relative success of this first tree burial cemetery attracted the attention of national newspapers and television broadcasts, contributing to the promotion of this concept in Japan. Today, at least 50 tree burial cemeteries provide their clientele with a form of tree burial.

Of particular relevance to the narratives and identities of its subscribers, this first tree burial cemetery distinguishes itself by its ecological ideas and practices. The priest laments the great damage suffered by Japan's natural environment and its native forests during the country's industrialization and post-war periods. He narrates that his motivation for supporting the creation of this burial system is the promotion and rehabilitation of

Japanese woodlands which were once former timber plantations and have been abandoned following the domestic lumber crisis of the 1970s (Iwai 2002; Knight 2006). His staff, foresters, university researchers, and a core of subscribers are regularly involved in the temple's forestry activities, ecological surveys, workshops, and research. Many of the tree burial cemeteries created subsequently adopted the environmental discourses and the idea that those buried in their cemetery "return to nature."

Tree burials and other new non-ancestral graves share several common attributes, which contrast fundamentally with the ancestral model. First, these systems do not require their subscribers to have a successor who will inherit and maintain their grave after their death. The staff and/or the community formed through such a burial practice, not the household members, ensure the maintenance of the grave, if any, and the performance of rituals for the dead. Second, the people whose bodily remains are buried in such a grave do not need to share a family bond. In other words, subscribers to these new grave systems choose with whom and without whom they wish to be memorialized.

The divergence of tree burial and other non-ancestral graves from family graves are symbolized by the use of names. On Japanese ancestral tombstones, the only name directly visible is the name of the household.[3] The individual posthumous names, or *kaimyō,* are usually written at the back or side of the ancestral grave. Mirroring the given name (*zokumei*) given at birth, *kaimyō* provides the individual with a new identity for the next world.[4] In contrast, those buried in the cemetery of tree burial, and other non-ancestral graves, retain their living names and thus the full individual identity of their lifetimes.[5]

Most tree burials differ from other non-ancestry-based systems in that they provide people with a grave of their own. As I have reported above, some non-ancestral grave systems (e.g., Moya no Hi) propose to their subscribers either to share a communal grave or, as in the case of *shizensō* (i.e., the scattering of ashes), to do away with a memorial place altogether. Some other cemetery operators propose a middle ground to these two approaches. Rowe (2003, 111–112) reports on a system developed by the head priest of a temple in Niigata Prefecture. This particular system consists of two graves. A large common grave, which bears no inscription, marks the center of a circle of smaller ossuaries. One may subscribe to one of these ossuaries where the ashes of the deceased, possibly one's own, are placed for a period of 12 years. He or she may choose to carve various inscriptions on a stone located in front of the ossuary. Subscribers may

personalize the ossuary by engraving the names of the deceased or a household, a household crest, or any word or phrase such as "love" or "dream." After a period of 12 years, however, the ashes contained in the surrounding ossuaries are all buried in the common grave located at the center. In such a case, subscribers of this non-ancestral system eventually share an anonymous communal grave.[6] In contrast to these practices, tree burial cemeteries provide subscribers with the possibility to purchase their own burial space where their ashes will be directly buried and will eventually dissolve in the earth beneath the tree.[7]

Negotiating Post-Mortem Identities

Tree burials and other non-ancestral grave systems have possibly set in motion a reform of the Japanese funerary industry or what Rowe (2003) described as "a grave revolution." Until the creation of non-ancestral burial systems, it was expected that the cremated remains of the deceased were invariably enshrined with those of the household's ancestors. The main exceptions were the deceased who had no successor to attend to and perpetuate their grave; they become unattached deceased or spirits (*muenbotoke*). Concomitant with the fate of uncared-for spirits, there is no choice but for the remains of these people to be placed in communal ossuaries before being buried in a common burial ground. Confirmed by my own findings (Boret 2014), Rowe (2011, 224) rightfully argues that "the fear of *muen* for one's ancestors and for oneself is the driving force behind the development and acceptance of new graves."

Following the decrease in the birth and marriage rates and the changes in family structure, temples are facing major financial losses. Ancestral graves, which constituted their main source of revenue, present serious problems. In addition to a decline in their numbers, an increasing number of the family graves already established become unattended. If the temple is unable to contact living family members, the cost of maintaining such graves falls on the temple, and the space they occupy represents a subsequent financial loss. Conversely, the increasing number of potentially uncared-for deceased also imply to become a major source of revenue for funerary professionals and Buddhist temples "struggling to find new ways to survive" (Rowe 2011, 67). I have suggested elsewhere that the problems, but also the potential economic benefits associated with the growing number of potential *muenbotoke,* have compelled and motivated

the creation of non-ancestral grave systems including tree burial (Boret 2012, 2014).

By offering alternatives to those potential *muenbotoke*, new modes of burial have also provided alternative ideas and practices of memorialization to the Japanese population more generally. In his comprehensive treatment of contemporary Japanese Buddhist temples, Rowe (2011, 5) discusses the implication of this general shift, stating that, "Once people are able to choose a grave site at a temple they like and one that places no burden on their children, the whole dynamic of relationships changes from one of obligation to one of choice." The possibility of purchasing their own grave has attracted a significant number of tree burial subscribers who were indeed expected to enter or could have chosen to establish a conventional ancestral grave, as well as those people who were expected to be buried in a grave for *muenbotoke*. In order to illustrate the specific relevance of tree burial to identity and memorialization, the next section presents several in-depth case studies.

Women's Identity and Posthumous Divorce

In recent literature concerning new forms of burial, scholars have reported on a new phenomena of posthumous divorce (*shigo rikon*). The feminist and scholar Inoue Haruyo invented this phrase in order to describe (and promote) women who choose to be buried outside their husbands' graves. Several scholars have since reported posthumous divorce. For instance, Yohko Tsuji writes with regard to non-ancestral graves:

> [T]hough having no descendants prompted many to buy these graves, there are people who purchase them even though they have both a grave and descendants. For instance, a married woman might acquire her own grave to avoid being buried with her mother-in-law with whom she did not get along. Those who have discord with their husband attain posthumous "divorce"…(Tsuji 2002, 188)

Both women who do not want to be buried with their husband and those who refuse to join the grave of their in-laws end up breaking their bonds with their household after, and to some extent *before* death.

In his article *Grave Changes*, Rowe also refers to the growing number of women who choose to purchase their own grave. His main example is The Society for a Women's Monument (Onna no Hi no Kai). Located in

the Kyoto region, this association was founded in 1979 and was originally created for those women who had lost their husbands during the Second World War. Its membership remained relatively low until the early 1990s when young single women suddenly started to join the Society. By 2000, its membership reached over 600. Rowe explains that the success of this Society is "part of a larger trend toward variety in funerary styles that is not only allowing single and widowed women to make choices, but also married women, who may not wish to spend eternity with their husband's ancestors" (Rowe 2003, 111).

Among tree burial subscribers, I have met several women who chose to part posthumously with their husbands or households. My first example is Sachiko, whom I met during my train journey the annual memorial service of the tree burial cemetery, which we were both going to attend. Already in her eighties, Sachiko was petite, dynamic, and quick-witted. During our conversation, Sachiko explained that she was originally from Kumimoro City in Shikoku Island, where the grave of her parents still remains. Born in a large household, she outlived all her brothers and sisters. When she married, Sachiko moved to Tokyo, where she raised her only child. Her daughter is a single mother and is doing her best to manage her own career and the education of her son.

As our conversation developed, I asked Sachiko her own reasons for purchasing a tree burial grave. Unlike many of my informants, the old lady did not mention the cost of ancestral graves, abusive Buddhist temples or her environmental concerns. Instead, Sachiko affirmatively said: "I don't want to be buried in the same grave as my husband." Without any further queries from me, Sachiko promptly explained the circumstances of her decision. After his retirement, her husband suffered a long illness. Sachiko found herself having not only to run the house but also bathe, dress and feed her husband every single day. She recalls this period as mentally and physically straining. Then Sachiko told me (to quote her words) "Japanese men are terrible! I spent all my life and old age taking care of my husband and he never once said thank you!" Sachiko concluded her discussion with me stating that when her husband died some 15 years ago she had decided that she would not share his grave. She ended up contracting, with the approval of her daughter, for her own grave.

During my research, very few women readily mentioned that their refusal to be buried in the same grave as their husbands or family-in-law contributed to their choice of tree burial. Even among my closest infor-mants, these issues were discussed only during the very last stages of my

fieldwork. Machiko, for example, is a mother of two sons and a daughter, all in their thirties. Throughout our initial interviews, she had always explained that she was concerned that none of her children had married and doubted that they ever would have children of their own.[8] Like many subscribers of tree burial, Machiko argued that an ancestral grave would become a burden for her children, and thus purchased a grave that did not require a successor. In one of our last meetings, however, my mention of the trend of posthumous divorce prompted Machiko to exclaim "I too do not want to be buried with my husband." She explained that her husband had passed away five years ago. Like his parents, he was a member of a fundamental Buddhist sect whose local communities traditionally organize the funeral and burial of its members. When I asked if she had considered being buried following their customs, Machiko replied that she was never really involved in its community but does not especially have any problems with this sect. Later during our conversation, she stated, "People are free to be buried where and with whom they want to share their life after death."

If Machiko admitted that she did not want to be buried with her husband, this did not imply that she wanted a grave only for herself. Her mother had contracted a tree burial grave for her deceased spouse and herself, and Machiko decided to join them in the grave. Most interestingly, her own daughter has also been taking part in tree burial events including memorial days and workshops. During one conversation, her daughter suggested that she was considering being buried in the same grave as her mother and her grandparents. This case suggests that the purchase of a tree burial grave is an opportunity to negotiate and create maternal (or neo-matrilineal) bonds, which are not recognized by conventional ancestral grave practices and the household system. In other words, it could represent an opportunity to create a lineage of women through the grave.

The cases of Machiko and Sachiko confirm that tree burial, like other non-ancestral graves, appeal to women who wish to be buried in their own graves and, as such, acquire a sense of agency over their own death in life. As such, they would support Tsuji, who argues that "The increasing popularity of *etai kuyōbo* [eternal and other non-ancestral grave systems], regardless of the existence of descendants, indicates that graves are being transformed from an *ie* [stem family household] symbol to an individual's eternal resting place. *Jumokusō* [tree burial], ... also follows this trend" (Tsuji 2002, 188). However, the case of Machiko shows that Tsuji's

assertion about individualization could be an oversimplification of what is really taking place. Some women are doing away with the household system model in favor not of merely an individualizing process, but rather becoming agents who are able to negotiate their posthumous representation and their social relationships in death.

Representations of Conjugal Relationships at the Grave

Another type of bond represented through a tree burial grave is conjugal relationships. Among the respondents to a survey carried out among 183 subscribers of tree burial, 60% replied that their spouses would be buried in their tree burial grave (Chisaka and Inoue 2003). My own research reveals that among these people we find two typical cases. On the one hand, we find widows and widowers who have purchased a grave after the death of their spouse. On the other hand, I have met several couples who purchased a grave while they were both alive. In both cases, each grave celebrates a conjugal relationship, not the life or the death of a single individual. Also, my research reveals that a conjugal grave is more likely to be purchased for a couple alone. I have encountered no married couple that has purchased a tree burial spot on the basis that one of their children will succeed to their grave. As such, one may suggest that tree burial provides an opportunity for a couple to purchase a grave of *their* own.

Among widows and widowers, I have encountered several people who, after their losing their wife or husband, were left with the burden of having to find a grave. In cases where they do not have a proper successor (e.g., a son or an adopted son), we find that many of them end up keeping the deceased's cremated remains for several months or years either at home or in a temporary ossuary. The problem of finding a grave exacerbates the emotional difficulties of dealing with mourning.

The first edition of *What You Need to Know about Tree Burial* (Chisaka and Inoue 2003) includes a testimony written by Kumiko about dealing with her husband's death. Kumiko's letter begins with the trauma of losing her husband, whose ashes she kept at home for several years. She writes, "I thought that once I had myself been reduced to ashes, my husband and I could be buried together . . . I could not stop trying to prolong the life I used to have with my husband when he was alive" (Chisaka and Inoue 2003, 54). Living in the neighborhood of the temple of tree burial, Kumiko once met the priest to whom she expressed her distress. The priest suggested that until she had carried out a memorial ritual and buried the ashes of her

husband, she would not be able to heal her sorrows. These few words made her reconsider the way she was dealing with her husband's remains and she finally decided to bury them. In her letter, Kumiko does not speak much of her reasons for choosing tree burial. She simply states that in all certainty, her husband would have wanted to return to nature. Through tree burial, however, the widow found a means of ending her mourning and a resting place for her husband, whom she joined in the grave in 2009.

Since Kumiko's letter, non-ancestral graves have increased in form and number. Nevertheless, it is difficult for those surviving their spouse to find a grave that, they feel, adequately celebrates their conjugal relationship. Such an experience was best explained by one of my close informants. In her sixties, Yoshiko lost her husband suddenly in 2002 after he was diagnosed with cancer. She lives alone in a suburb of Tokyo where she works as a part time chemist. As the couple had never borne any children or made provisions for a grave, Yoshiko first decided to place the cremated remains of her husband in the common ossuary of a public cemetery in Tokyo, where they were kept for over five years.

Aware that the ossuary was only a temporary solution, Yoshiko began to search for a permanent grave for her husband and herself. The first possibility was to scatter his ashes at sea (i.e., *shinzensō*). Yoshiko writes, "When he was still healthy, he used to say as a joke 'when I die, it would be great if my bones were sprinkled in the sea! Because I could travel all around the world!'" Yoshiko and her husband shared a love for travelling and enjoyed walking in mountains and large natural spaces. On this basis, *shizensō* seemed a viable option. However, the widow expressed her apprehension at having no fixed location for his remains where she could visit her husband. The second solution for Yoshiko was what is known as Buddha statue burial. This method consists of the making of a large Buddha statue with the cremated remains of several thousand deceased people. By all appearances she considered this method because her husband was born and brought up in the region where the only temple of Buddha statue burial is located. This was a means of returning the ashes of her husband to his original hometown; the bond with one's native region (*chien*) is, with that of family ties, a most significant element of one's social identity (Rowe 2003, 103). However, Yoshiko argues that the temple was too far from Tokyo and would not allow regular visits to her husband's grave.

While Yoshiko was pursuing her research, her best friend informed her about a temple opening the first tree burial cemetery in Iwate Prefecture. Following her visit to the cemetery, the widow realized

that this form of burial would best memorialize her relationship with her husband as well as his identity. In addition to their love for natural spaces, her husband was himself a collector of butterflies and an amateur naturalist. He would thus approve of the ecological activities and incentives of tree burial.[9] Finally, Yoshiko explains that, although her husband was not originally from the region of tree burial, she was herself brought up in a neighboring prefecture and graduated from a local University which is not only just an hour away from the cemetery, but also happens to be the university once attended by the priest of the tree burial temple.

Since the burial of her husband, Yoshiko has become involved in the activities of the community built around this tree burial ground. She has made many friends while taking part in memorials and ecological workshops. Although the grave of her husband is relatively far from Tokyo, she visits the cemetery up to five times a year. During various memorial events, we have together visited the grave of her husband. Once she said, "Sooner or later, I am looking forward to sharing [the grave] with my husband."

Celebrating a conjugal relationship at the cemetery is not only reflected in the narratives that subscribers might use but also by the means of symbolic representation expressed through the trees. During one of the information sessions held at the temple, I met Naoko, who had come to visit the tree burial site on behalf of her father. Naoko explained that her father had recently become seriously ill and she was looking for a burial place for him and his deceased wife. When we reached the top of the mountain, Naoko explained that her father wished to be buried with his wife near a magnolia *hypoleuca* tree (*hōnoki*). This particular species seems to have been the object of cherished moments during the course of her parents' relationship. With the help of the staff and myself, Naoko soon found a grave available that was close to a large *hōnoki* tree, split into two large trunks. After choosing the exact burial spot, we proceeded with the planting of the tree. Naoko's father decided to plant two *rhododendron dilatatum* on the grave. These two trees were to be intertwined as a symbol of their union as husband and wife.

While carrying out my research at the tree burial site, I encountered other cases in which the tree planted at the grave becomes a symbolic representation of the personal relationship between the bereaved and the dead. For example, a woman who buried her husband in their mutual grave explained that she had planted a Japanese apricot tree because her late husband used to collect these fruits for her every summer. She said it

was her tree of remembrance (*omoidasu ki desu*). In contrast, I was told of a married couple who, although they had purchased a common resting place, made provisions for their remains and their trees to be planted slightly apart. It seemed that this couple wanted to affirm their individuality within their union.

In addition to widows and widowers, there are couples who are choosing a tree burial grave when both spouses are alive. For example, Noriko is a wife and mother of three children, including a son. One of her daughters is still living at home. During our interview, Noriko explained that members of her family had often conflicted over funeral and grave matters. Based on her experience, Noriko resolved to relieve her own children of this burden. First, she decided to plan and organize her own funeral ceremonies before her death. The various arrangements included the persons who should be informed of her death and take part in her funeral, what dress and jewels she should wear, as well as her makeup and the type of flowers that should be laid out on the funeral altar. Second, the couple have decided to renounce the family grave and oppose the abusive Buddhist temples' and funeral companies' businesses. In other words, they want to relieve their children from the psychological and financial burden that an ancestral grave might represent to their children after their death.

The account presented by Noriko confirms that drawing from their own experience of having to care for their family grave, some married couples choosing tree burial wish to spare their children the trouble of having to care for their grave while satisfying their own needs. By choosing this practice, Noriko and her husband gave themselves the opportunity to make new social relationships with people who will share the cemetery after death. She explained that subscribers have a chance to know and understand each other during events organized by the tree burial temple, such as ecological workshops and memorials. Most important, my informant suggested that another benefit of this particular tree burial cemetery is its remoteness. Noriko does not want her children to visit her grave after her death. She asserted, "The cemetery is the world of the souls [not of the living]." Likewise, planning her own funeral implies that Noriko can choose the way in which her death will be celebrated when she passes away and, most significantly, who should attend her funeral. In other words, Noriko takes control over the representation of her own death.

So far, I have examined cases of women who wish to acquire their own grave and that of widows or widowers who, through the purchase of their own grave, are celebrating the conjugal relationship they enjoyed with their

deceased spouse. Some of their narratives also touched upon the need for a symbiosis between the ecological character of the cemetery and their husband or wife's identity. A husband might have had an interest in natural science or enjoyed walking the forest, as in the case of Yoshiko. Moreover, I examined the case of couples for whom the purchase of a grave of their own seemed the main object of focus. I have suggested that such an approach was common among couples in which both spouses were still alive. In the following section, however, I discuss examples where the deceased's life and identity appears to be the main focus of memorialization.

Memorialization of Personal Biographies

One of the richest accounts of an individual's memorialization was related to me by Aoko Yamaguchi, an 83-year-old widow. Her account begins with the time that she and her husband, Shinji, were driving back from Niigata Prefecture, northwest of Tokyo, where they had taken part in a Buddhist memorial service for his ancestors. While driving, her husband reflected upon his life and shared his thoughts about his own memorialization. Yamaguchi had served in the Japanese army during the war. He was soldier of a flying regiment, which fought on the Chinese front. Although he survived the war, many of Shinji's comrades were killed and buried in the ground of the mountain where they suffered a fatal air raid. In order to share their fate symbolically, Shinji expressed his will to also be buried in a mountain.

Listening to the request of her husband, Aoko thought about the fact that such modes of burial had been banned beginning in the Meiji Era and that she might never be able to fulfill her husband's wish. Seven years later, however, she found out about tree burial, which had been established in the meantime. When her husband died at the age of 80 in April 2004, she made provisions for a tree burial grave where he was buried two months later. During the funeral, Aoko read the following patriotic war song (*gunka*) in memory of her husband:

Umi yukaba	*If I go away to the sea,*
Midzuku kabane	*I shall be a corpse washed up.*
Yama yukaba	*If I go away to the mountain,*
Kusa musu kabane	*I shall be a corpse in the grass*
Okimi no he ni koso shiname	*But if I die for you [the Emperor],*
Kaerimi wa seji	*It will not be a regret.*

In addition, Aoko, an amateur of *tanka* writing (31 syllable poems), read a couple of *tanka* that she wrote in memory of her husband and later published in the tree burial temple newsletter.[10] These poems reflect her thoughts about the death and burial of her husband. Aoko describes in her last correspondence that discovering tree burial was a means of providing her husband with his desired memorialization. She writes, "I felt calm when I visited my husband's grave ... and worshipped the tree that has grown since it was planted." One evening, while walking in the cemetery, she watched the fireflies and felt that the beauty of the scene healed her heart.[11]

The particularity of Aoko's experience is the centrality of her husband's personal history within the process of memorialization. Unlike the cases of widows mentioned in the previous section, Aoko does not mention her relationship with her husband or her own relationship with the concept of tree burial. Instead, her narrative revolves around her husband's traumatic experience of the war and his desire to be buried in a way that would express his solidarity with his comrades who died and were buried on the Chinese mountain. In symbiosis with her narrative, her readings of a war song and personalized *tanka* poems at her husband's funeral together seem to epitomize the post-mortem identity of her husband, or what Long in this volume refers to as "post-death self."

The individuality of the deceased also resonates in Michiko's account. At the time of our interview, Michiko was in her early forties and was working as a private home furniture designer in the center of Tokyo, Ginza. Kazuo, her deceased husband, was originally from Saitama Prefecture, greater Tokyo, and had been a performing artist. He was the second son of a large family that included five brothers and sisters. The eldest brother of Kazuo is still living with his parents and has no family of his own. For this reason, Michiko expects that Kazuo's younger brother, who already has two children, including a son, will probably inherit and maintain the grave of her husband's household.

When artist Kazuo was diagnosed with cancer, he continued to perform his art, for he knew that there was no medical treatment that could save him. Despite the situation, they never managed to talk about his funeral or burial place before he passed away. When she began searching for a grave, Michiko excluded the possibility of Buddhist memorial services for her husband. The reason was that she had often heard her mother-in-law complaining about the financial, emotional, and practical burden that the ancestral grave presented. In particular, when her mother-in-law

would ask the priest about the function of the various memorial or religious artifacts the priest required her to purchase, the priest always gave the same elusive answer: "It is to build the deceased's road to heaven." Finding the explanation of the priest meaningless and financially driven, Michiko grew unsympathetic toward conventional memorialization and Buddhist temples.

While looking for an alternative form of memorialization, Michiko remembered having seen a program on television about tree burial and searched for further information on the internet. Looking at the website, Michiko thought that it would be an ideal place to memorialize her husband and decided to visit the cemetery. While walking through the forest, Michiko recalled one of her husband's exhibitions, *Performance in the Forest*, and looked for a place that would reflect her husband's artwork. After almost losing her way in the cemetery, she finally found a tree that resembled the one used by her husband for the promotion of his exhibition and chose a burial space nearby.

The burial of her husband's remains took place in October 2005 in the company of her youngest brother-in-law, her mother's brother, his child, and her father. She refused to allow her elder brother-in-law to be present at the funeral, for his relationship with her husband had been conflictual. On the day of the burial, she planted an oldham blueberry tree (*vaccinium oldhamii* or *natsuhaze* in Japanese) which, she commented disappointedly, has not grown very much and still bears no flowers. However, she adds that every time she has visited her husband's grave, a black insect has been sitting on one of its branches. As her husband was always wearing black, Michiko likes to think that this insect could be the reincarnation of her husband.

After contracting for tree burial, her friends, the siblings of her husband, and her own parents all agreed that she had a burial space in the image of her husband. When she visits the cemetery, Michiko remembers some of her husband's artistic creations in which he used natural materials such as earth, plants, and tree branches to symbolize and communicate ideas of death. As time passes, Michiko feels more confident about the concordance between tree burial and her husband's art, and as such, about her decision to bury him in the forest.

Within the various cases discussed in this chapter, the memorialization of soldier Yamaguchi and artist Kinohara are certainly among the most tangible cases of individual memorialization. One may suggest that through this process, Michiko and Aoko have individualized the deceased

to an extent uncommon in Japan. Even in these two cases, however, two particular elements do not enable us to speak of an individualization of the deceased. My interviews with the two widows revealed that Michiko and Aoko are natives of the region of the first tree burial cemetery, Iwate Prefecture. Michiko was born and raised in a large household in the city of Tonō that is located less than two hours north of the tree burial cemetery. Likewise, Aoko explained in her letter that she used to attend an elementary school located only a dozen miles away from the cemetery. One might reasonably suggest that their respective connections to the region have also significantly influenced their decision to bury their husband in tree burial.

Tree burial also presents limitations with regard to the representation of the deceased identity(ies) at the grave. To begin with, subscribers are not able to express their social and economic status. Grave users must choose a tree from the list proposed by the office. As I have discussed elsewhere (Boret 2014), the trees planted at the grave are bush trees remaining more or less of the same size and their costs do not vary. Likewise, the grave plots themselves are of equal measure and are marked by a simple wooden tablet (s) on which no inscriptions besides the name of the deceased or subscriber is to be found. Finally, the regulations of tree burial stipulate that no object but cut flowers and the like may be left at the grave.

This egalitarianism contrasts greatly with the practices found in many stone-based cemeteries. In the conventional ancestral grave system, the grave is said to represent the status of the household or deceased. Primarily, the tombstones vary in size, the quality of the granite, the engraving, the complexity of the design, and the number of artifacts added to the grave. Moreover, a household's status was commonly measured by the number of generations contained in the grave. People would indeed trace back ancestors in order to add further names on the grave site. Last but not least, one may purchase a plot of land in a prestigious cemetery in order to acquire or demonstrate the status of his family or his own. None of these strategies can be applied in the tree burial cemetery itself. As such, customary graveyards clearly allow for a more tangible representation of the identity of the dead members of society and their survivors.

From the subscribers' perspectives, the level of uniformity within their cemetery does not translate into standardization, but rather egalitarianism and solidarity. For instance, I discussed the practices of another Japanese tree burial with Akira. I explained that its subscribers

were able to add a picture of the deceased and various ornaments, and decorate the grave with planted flowers. Akira responded that rather than increasing the level of personalization, the practices observed at this other tree burial were more like gardening and self-interested memorialization. In contrast, he stressed that the subscribers of the original tree burial cemetery, where he will be buried, were concerned with improving the natural environment of Japan and shared this responsibility as a group. In other words, he saw tree burial is as much about creating a new community as it is about providing people with a grave of their own.

PEOPLE'S OWN GRAVE

The case studies discussed above support the idea that for many people tree burial marks a move away from the principles of the household system. First, I have shown that some subscribers reject the idea of a grave system based on generational or family continuity. Even those who have a successor who would be able to inherit and be buried in their ancestral grave argue that their children should choose their own grave independently. Second, some subscribers reject or free themselves from the exclusivity of the household's identity within their representation of death. Their ideas and practices of memorialization are celebrations and negotiations of deceased and/or deceased-to-be identities. The preservation of the secular name, the location of the grave and the choice of the tree species, and the mortuary rituals are all elements that contribute to the representation of the deceased's identities and relationships at the tree burial grave.

Agency and the Personalization of the Grave

The patterns found in tree burial have been discussed as, in part, a form of individualization of the deceased. In an article about novel forms of non-ancestral burial, Rowe writes: "We may now speak of the 'individualization' of the dead, in which a person's own desires for post-mortem treatment take precedence over the wishes of [his/her] family or the expectations of society" (Rowe 2003, 113). Moreover, Rowe argues that "the deceased, who with the increasing choices and commercialization of the funeral process, has a kind of presence at the funeral, not only in spirit and memory, but also as an individual (consumer) with choices and wants" (Rowe 2000, 371). In other words, Rowe identifies a shift from

kinship-based to individualized memorialization whereby the deceased or deceased-to-be has become an individual consumer deciding upon the performance of his/her own memorialization.

My research problematizes Rowe's contention that the deceased has become an individual consumer for his/her own death. First of all, I have shown that the subscriber and the deceased memorialized at a non-ancestral grave are not always the same person. In the case of tree burial, although a great majority of subscribers are purchasing their own grave prior to their death, some of the deceased buried in the cemetery had not directly chosen this practice while alive. Among many couples, I have found cases where the deceased husband either had no knowledge of tree burial or had not expressed his preference with regard to memorialization. Tree burial might not therefore reflect the deceased's will or choice. Moreover, subscribers, as will be discussed further below, are asked by the staff to consult their children, relatives, and sometimes in-laws before subscribing to it. This implies that the deceased's sense of self and idea of memorialization do not necessarily take priority over those of the bereaved, *and vice versa*; I return to the problem of agency and choice later in this discussion.

In addition to the idea of the dead-to-be becoming an individual consumer, Rowe's analysis seems to assume that the celebration of an individual's life equals individualization. However, I believe that this analysis confuses the concepts of individualization and personalization. With regard to contemporary funerals, Rowe himself reports that "the emphasis of the [ancestral] funeral on pacifying the potentially dangerous spirit has shifted to bidding a proper, *social* farewell to an individual and offering condolences to the family" (Rowe 2000, 372, italics are mine). In other words, mortuary rites remain a collective and social fact within which individuality is instrumental in expressing the social dimension of death and necessary funerals.

My study shows that even if the precepts of the ancestral grave system are put aside, a grave remains a representation of collective identities.[12] Widows and widowers who purchase a grave at the tree burial in order to celebrate their conjugal relationships also express the identities of the deceased spouse as well as their own. Even in cases where a woman chooses not to be buried in her husband's ancestral tomb, she might share a tree burial grave with her own parents and possibly her daughter. In addition, I discussed the case of married couples who choose a grave of their own in order to relieve their children from the burden of having to care for a family grave. Even in the cases of soldier Yamaguchi and artist Kazuo where individualization of the dead seems paramount, their

respective widows still expressed their own identities. The wives are both native to the region where the cemetery of tree burial is located. Hence by choosing tree burial, these women also mark their attachment to their native place (i.e., *furusato*), one of the most significant elements of an individual's identity in Japan (Yano 2002, 18).[13] Finally, it is far from rare for subscribers to establish an ancestral or family grave in the tree burial cemetery. This reminds us that even when individualism becomes an ideology (Hendry 2008, 95), a person (*hito*) is always embedded within his/her social milieu (Long 2005; see also Mauss 1985).

In addition to the multiple identities represented at the grave, we must consider the subscribers' personalization of death as social processes. In England, Pendergast et al. argue that:

> While contemporary practice is no longer bound by a traditional fixity of place, or indeed social relationships or collective memorialization, the diversity reported by interviewees do demonstrate a common concern to achieve symbolic forms of re-integration and coherence. That is to say, the choices being made allow the deceased, and their mourning, to be more firmly re-inscribed with the times and spaces which constituted their life history and social identity – using the cultural legacies and social and technological resources currently available. (Prendergast et al. 2006, 889)

In other words, the personalization of the deceased's resting place comes from a desire to bond with the deceased and to share a common place. In the same vein, Long reminds us that people's narratives of the self are social processes in an attempt to negotiate one's position, and possibly that of others (i.e., the dead) within a wider group (Long 2005, 381). Instead of individualization, I argue that memorialization at tree burial revolves around people's sense of agency in representing identities, either latent or reminiscent, of the people with whom they intend to share the grave as well as their own, while also negotiating their social relationships within and outside the community of the tree burial.[14]

Instrumentality and the Appropriation of Death

An important trend within Japanese mortuary practices is the desire for the bereaved and the dead-to-be to retake control over mortuary rites and representation of death. In his analysis of changing post-mortem rituals, Rowe convincingly argues that since the post-war period there has been

a "growing physical separation between the mourning family and the corpse" following the professionalization and commercialization of mortuary rites (Rowe 2000, 354, see also; Suzuki 2000). These changes include the place of death (i.e., from the home to the hospital),[15] the agents of death celebrations (from family/community to professional funeral staff), and finally the burial site of the remains (i.e., from family-temple to privately run cemeteries). Concurrent with this trend, scholars have also observed the loss of knowledge about conducting mortuary rites (Namihira 1997; Suzuki 2000).

An example of such a shift is found in funerals. Drawing on her field-work in a funeral parlor, Suzuki (2003) identifies how commercial funeral ceremonies have come to dominate the funerary industry. These forms of funerals are characterized by a high level of efficiency, predictability, and standardization (Suzuki 2003, 51–59). To begin with, the large funeral corporation in which Suzuki carried out her field restricted their initial meeting with the bereaved to an hour during which they established the total cost and overall organization of the ceremony. The swiftness and set format of this meeting reduced the decision-making authority of the bereaved. The ceremony itself, Suzuki explains, is no longer managed by the mourners and their community but exclusively by the funeral staff who cater for predictable and consistent funerals. Although these highly stan-dardized and controlled funerals may suit funeral directors, Suzuki reports that this model is no longer a satisfactory celebration of death for a growing section of the Japanese population.[16]

Amidst these trends in the funeral industry, some Japanese people have regained interest in being active agents at the mortuary rituals of their loved ones and, as we saw, their own. Suzuki (1998) reports new forms of funeral ceremonies, namely living funerals and non-religious funerals.[17] The former is based on the principle that an individual organizes and conducts his/her funeral ceremony. One of their motivations is to regain control over the celebration of their death and express their indebtedness to the people who constitute their network of social relationships. With regard to non-religious funerals and other commercialized ceremonies, Suzuki argues that these new forms allow for the formation of "new social ties" (i.e., non-*ie* family bonds) which are highly personalized (ibid., 73). She argues that through these types of funerals Japanese people are able to contest the hegemony and standardization of contemporary funerals.

This shift toward (re)gaining control over the organization of funeral ceremonies by the bereaved family and the deceased-to-be is also an

important subject of discussion within the tree burial community. Since its establishment in 1999, the temple has developed a partnership with a funeral associative organization (a non-profit organization (NPO)). Located in Hokkaido, this NPO provides its members with free assistance in the planning and the performance of private and affordable funeral ceremonies. Several tree burial subscribers are also part of this association. One, Keiko, shared her experience as a widow. While discussing the loss of her husband, my informant complained not only about the high costs of contemporary mortuary services but also their degree of standardization, making for impersonal funerals. In contrast to commercial funerals, Keiko was delighted by the services offered by the association. Guided by other members, she was able to organize herself a more affordable and personal ceremony celebrating the life of her husband and his relationships with family and friends.

Reporting on the emergence of what might be called "do-it-yourself funerals," the national television broadcasting company, NHK, used this association and the funeral of Keiko's husband as case studies. This trend in "home-made-funeral" (Suzuki 1998, 172) indicates a rejection of the commercialization and standardization of funerary practices that characterize post-war and most of contemporary Japanese funerary practices.

The (re)appropriation of post-mortem and funeral rituals seems to find its counterpart in new burial practices. An example of this trend is the scattering of ashes (*shinzensō*). In her study, Tsuji (2002) reports that the aim of those promoting *shinzensō* is to provide subscribers with an opportunity to regain control over the disposal of the dead. Tsuji remarks that their policy is clearly stipulated by the very name of this organization: "Association for Promoting Freedom in Mortuary Rituals" (Tsuji 2002, 189).[18] Rather than the sole individualization of the deceased, I would like to suggest that the personalization of the dead found at tree burial relates to, for some Japanese people, the (re)appropriation of death practices by the deceased-to-be or the bereaved, who have cultural authority to represent the deceased.

Considering the personalization and (re)appropriation of the treatment of the dead, I suggest that tree burial and other alternative burial forms may be thought of as providing people with a grave of their own, or people's own grave. The neutrality of the term *people* reflects the fact that neither individualization nor membership in a family or any predetermined group defines who is to be buried in such a grave. People choose with(out) whom they share the grave, reminding us that people have

"simultaneous multiple social identities" beyond kinship (Panourgiá 1995, xxii). The emphasis on grave ownership not only personalizes a burial space but also constitutes a general (re)appropriation of the representation of one's own death.

The concept of people's own grave draws from Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's notion of contemporary individualization and their essay, "Death of One's Own, Life of One's Own" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). Their notion is not based on traditions of Enlightenment or liberalism, which see the individual as the primary unit of society (Lash 2001, vii). Instead, Beck suggests that in contemporary Western societies individuals are no longer given true choices yet are continually compelled to choose their own lives and identity. Beck writes:

> The ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time. (Beck and Elisabeth 2001, 23)

Although drawing from a different tradition (i.e., Marxism), Giddens (1991) similarly claims that "in later modern societies, we *must* make choices to construct a 'self' that is socially recognized" (Long 2005, 380). While confirming a fundamental tenet of anthropology, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim and Giddens argue that the act of choosing or constructing one's own life and thus identity is imposed by a society's ideology.

This brief introduction to Beck and Beck-Gersheim's ideas advance our understanding of the nature of personalization experienced by tree burial subscribers. On the one hand, I have argued that these people are renouncers of the ancestral grave system (Boret 2011). The term "renouncer" emphasizes the extent to which a growing section of the population feels compelled ideologically and/or practically to choose an alternative to the conventional ancestral grave system. In this sense, these people are also instruments of the birth of new non-ancestral grave systems; that is, they became a means for the creation of these new forms of burial, initially, not because of their own will but because of their outcast conditions (i.e., unrelated spirits) within the conventional ancestral grave system. On the other hand, this chapter shows that subscribers have found in tree burial a form of memorialization through which they have become the authors of the memorialization of their own death and/or that of other persons close

to them. This sense of acquired agency results not only from tree burial but also from the fact that people are able to choose tree burial among other forms of non-ancestral graves. As a result, one might argue that tree burial subscribers are both instruments and agents of their representations of death, albeit at different levels.

An example of this instrumentality-agency juxtaposition is the discussion about the celebration of conjugal relationships. We have couples who initially seem to be agents of the representation of their own death. In particular, I presented the experience of couples who chose a non-ancestral grave despite having the necessary successor and financial means of purchasing an ancestral grave. These parents also wished to relieve their children of the burden of having to care for their grave and memorialization. However, the same couples concurrently suggested that in Japan parents could no longer rely upon their children to care properly for their cremated remains after their death. As such, the same people might be seen as instruments of changes within practices of death. One of my informants most suggestively said, "It is strange to think that you are burying yourself," denoting the duality of their act.

In contrast to this case, many couples to whom tree burial caters are initially the instruments rather than the agents of their choice. Most of these couples have neither successor (i.e., a biological or adopted son) nor the financial resources necessary for the acquisition of a generational grave. They are therefore constrained to purchase a non-ancestral grave. Because of their instrumentality, however, these people have consequently become agents of their own representations of death through the process of establishing a grave in the tree burial cemetery. By representing their own identity and relationships at their final resting place, such couple have given meaning to and thus become agents in the planning of their own death rites. In both of these cases, many couples, who have chosen a grave of their own, argue that, although their children were welcome to enter their grave after their death, their children, too, would have to think for themselves and choose their own grave in the future.

Varying degrees of instrumentality and agency were also found among widows. In cases where a couple had made no provisions for burial prior to the death of one of the spouses, the survivor is responsible for dealing with the remains of the deceased spouse and ensuring that they will have a grave for themselves. A grave is also a place where the bereaved may mourn their departed spouse and/or celebrate their conjugal relationship. As such, the surviving spouse is required to act as the agent in the social death of their

deceased spouse. They are required to memorialize both the identity of the deceased and their own. This need for agency is especially relevant when the deceased spouse has made an explicit request regarding his or her resting place. By purchasing a grave of their own, however, widows and widowers seem to reconcile their roles as instruments and agents of social death.

In comparison to the above cases, the new sense of agency is also found among women subscribers who have decided to be buried outside the grave of their husband or family-in-law. According to the household system, a married woman becomes a member of her husband's household, shares his family grave, where she receives ancestral mortuary rituals, and ends up being integrated in the body of her husband's ancestors. However, we find that some women choose to reject these conventions and instead gain posthumous independence and/or preserve their identity by purchasing their own grave. While fulfilling their own expectations, some of these women chose to care for and be themselves buried with their parents. Their situation reflects the new degree of choice for individuals in choosing their own representation of death, those of their loved ones, and the aptitude to negotiate their social relationships around death.

Following these observations, I suggest that the concept of people's own grave captures the agency-instrumentality juxtaposition found in tree burial in a twofold manner. First, it enables us to apprehend the fact that the individual that subscribes to a grave and the deceased might not be the same person. The two parties are therefore interchangeably agent and instrument of death celebrations. Second, people's own grave translates the subscriber's agency and aptitude in dealing with post-mortem representations of identity and social relationships. This analytical category does not restrict us to a mere individualization process. Third, people's own grave also encompasses the idea that subscribers of tree burial are not solely agents but also instruments of social death. They remain liable to social obligations as they, for example, feel obliged to respect the identity and will of the deceased or the deceased-to-be while fulfilling their own.

Family Authority

During my research, I was able to observe the practical limitations of people's capacity to choose tree burial as their own grave and/or that of their loved ones. Some of my informants seemed to have avoided telling certain members of their families about their choice. On one occasion

I had the opportunity to discuss this issue with one of the staff of tree burial. He explained that since the opening of the cemetery, there had been several instances when the children or relatives of the deceased subscriber had refused to allow the burial to take place. In the most extreme case, he reports, children of the deceased came to the office with a shovel, ready to dig up for themselves the remains of their parents, which they wanted to bury in a conventional grave.

The priest explained that the temple of tree burial could not oppose the children or relatives' will. If an individual desires to recover his or her relatives' remains, the normal procedure is for the bereaved to obtain authorization from both the temple and that of the temple where the cremated remains are expected to be reburied. Both of these documents must then be brought to the city council, which issues an authorization for the transfer of the human remains between the two temples. This procedure seems to have been relatively common in post-war Japan as many families migrated away from their native villages and chose to rebury their ancestors near their newly established households. The conflicting views held by subscribers and their children or other relatives have put the temple in a delicate situation on several occasions. I have witnessed the staff clearly encouraging and even asking people to think through their decisions and discuss it with their children and kin before contracting a grave in their cemetery in order to avoid such discontent in the future.

As I grew aware of the problem surrounding the family authority over death, I inquired about the experiences of tree burial subscribers. I asked Noriko, who had just made the provisions for her grave and her funeral, if her children would have the right to cancel her contract if they opposed the idea. By all appearances, she did not seem concerned by this issue. Although Noriko recognized that she will not have any control over her mortuary rituals after she dies, she thought that her children would probably avoid cancelling her plans so as not to waste the money she has invested so far. Like Noriko, others suggested that they were well aware that if their children or relatives opposed their will, there is legally nothing to protect their choice of burial.

In Japan, laws and customs still give rights to the bereaved, not to the dead (Lock 2002, 181; Long 2005, 385).[19] At the very beginning of my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to discuss this issue with an elderly woman. Of a comfortable social and traditional background, Maori was a grandmother and mother of two children including a son. She was not a member of tree burial and had heard nothing about it until we met.

During our conversation, she said, "I would like to be scattered at sea . . . But even if I decided to do it, my son would not allow it and would put me in the family grave after I died." Although at the time I was not aware of the implication of her comment, I have since come to appreciate that Maori's resignation illustrates the common understanding that it is the bereaved family and not the dead that has the last word with regard to *social* death.

CONCLUSION

In response to the original question "What are the implications of choosing tree burial with regard to identity and memorialization?", this chapter revealed a clear move away from the identity of the household or family toward a more personalized form of representation of death. Although the identities of the individuals buried in a tree burial grave are central to subscribers' narratives and representations of death, I found that their social relationships (i.e., friendship, kinship, etc.) are still being negotiated and remembered at the grave. Based on this evidence, I argue that what we observe is not the individualization of the deceased but a representation of the deceased's ascribed and acquired identities memorialized at the grave.[20]

The patterns observed in tree burial might be concurrent with a minor trend within Japanese funeral practices; a (re)appropriation of death. Reviewing some of the changes within mortuary practices during postwar Japan, this chapter identified a high level of commercialization, professionalization, and standardization. The post-mortem treatment of the corpse has shifted in many areas of Japan from the bereaved and their community to the professionals of private funeral businesses. Amidst the dominant practices of community and Buddhist funerals, I have suggested the emergence of self-made funerals whereby the bereaved and their relatives regain control of the celebration of death.[21] Following this trend, I propose that tree burial can be seen as a burial system that provides people with a greater degree of agency over their own death.

Finally, I believe that our study of the burial system of tree burial and other non-ancestral grave systems advances our understanding the individualization of death in Japan. Capturing the agency-instrumentality of tree burial subscribers, and possibly other non-ancestral grave users, I proposed that tree burial provide what I refer to as "people's own grave." This analytical concept was used as a means to discuss both the individual choices

and social constraints faced by the subscribers in the process of choosing and establishing a grave. In particular, I have shown the ability of grave users to reconcile individual desires and social identities in order to fit social expectations and duties, including vis-à-vis the tree burial community. This aptitude of subscribers, especially in comparison to those who expect and accept burial in an ancestral grave, translates their consciousness of their own agency or "authorship" in the process of memorializing their own and/or the death of their family members. In other words, tree burial stands at the intersection of both society's and the individual's response to death.

Notes

1. In their introduction to their collection of essays, Bloch and Parry specify that, unlike Huntington and Metcalf, their analysis attempts to unravel the "social implications of mortuary practices" for "social order is a *product* of rituals . . . rather than their cause" (Bloch and Parry 1982, 6).

2. The recent practice of replacing the tombstone with a tree is found across many regions of the world (see Boret 2014). This practice is part of a more general trend that promotes ecological or environmentally friendly burial practices. This trend may be said to have started in the United Kingdom before spreading to other regions of the world including Europe, America and Asia (see Davies and Rumble 2012 for a study of tree burial in the United Kingdom).

3. Despite this difference concerning the usage of name, I must draw attention to the fact that the dead memorialized either at an ancestral or tree burial grave will eventually lose their individual identities. Following a series of rituals, lasting usually for 33 or more years, the deceased member of a household becomes an ancestor. He or she is no longer viewed as an individual spirit but as part of a corpus of ancestors. The dead members of a household therefore lose their individual identities. With regard to tree burial, I have explained that if a grave is not taken over by a successor, friend, or relative, it will be recycled and used by a new subscriber. Although some considered the possibility of having their children buried in their grave, most informants assumed that after 33 years, the length of a tree burial contract, the grave markers, and possibly their trees, will be removed. Drawing on this fact, it might be said that tree burial retains some elements of ancestor worship in that the deceased individual's identity is assumed to fade away. According to my research, however, people show little concern about being socially immortalized or having their identity preserved among the living eternally.

4. Although I have not carried out research on contemporary practices, it might be worth pointing out that in the past there was some sense of

continuity between the living and posthumous name. For instance, the posthumous names given to men often retained a character from their living names. Also, the posthumous names of both women and men would include "an indication of the general age-group to which the person belonged at death; often a stereotyped but occasionally highly personalized reference to qualities ('obedient wife,' 'beautiful woman'); some detail of life history ('died at a tragically early age'), and in some instances the manner of death ('killed in war,' 'died in a mountain-climbing accident')" (Smith 1974, 82–83). Moreover, Reader tells us that "the bestowal of the *kamyō*, in conferring a new belonging and identity on the seventh day after death, in many ways parallels the custom of earlier times of naming babies on the seventh day after birth to provide them with their identity of this world" (Reader 1991, 90; see also Ooms 1976, 65).

5. Although I now emphasize the relevance or implication of this practice with regard to the identity of the deceased, the absence of a posthumous name also implies that subscribers of tree burial do not have to pay the large sum of money conventionally paid to the priest in order to acquire a posthumous name (Smith 1974, 82; Rowe 2000). Moreover, an informant told me that although they do not appear on a tree burial grave, the bereaved might well purchase a posthumous name and a memorial tablet to memorialize the spirits of the deceased at a family altar. Many informants have reported that they do not possess such a family altar or/and purchased a *kamyō* for the dead buried in the cemetery of tree burial. However, this research was not carried out systematically and cannot therefore be conclusive.

6. This is reminiscent of the rural Greek practice discussed by Danforth in *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (1982). In contrast to the Japanese custom, however, Danforth (1982, 56) reports that one's remains entering the village ossuary is synonymous with a "complete incorporation into the world of the dead."

7. Assessing the period necessary for human remains to dissolve into the ground is almost impossible. Archaeologists are well aware that this chemical process depends on the characteristics of the soil as well as the climatic conditions that follow the burial. Regardless of the time frame, however, subscribers perceive that the deceased's remains will remain forever in the earth. Moreover, one of the staff explained that even though the majority of subscribers' contracts should terminate after 33 years, their ashes and the tree-tomb would not necessarily be removed.

8. We observe in Japan an increasing number of young men and women who simply refuse to get married or have children (Nakano 2013).

9. The first tree burial distinguished itself by its ecological incentives and activities including forest rehabilitation, ecological workshops, and research in collaboration with the University of Tokyo. The priest and his supporters

lament the great damage suffered by Japan's natural environment, especially its native forests, since the country's industrialization and in the post-war periods. The priest created this burial system in order to promote and contribute to the rehabilitation of forests which were once former timber plantations and have been abandoned following the lumber domestic crisis during the 1970s (Iwai 2002; Knight 2006).

10. The following was read during the funeral ceremony:
    I deposit in the hole shriveled and faint memories
    (乾びるて昔のかそけきを穴に収む)
    The light of fresh leaves, in the land of tree burial
    (樹木葬草地の青葉のひかり)
    I bury the bones in the *satoyama* of Sukawa Mountain
    (須川岳の里山の地に骨を埋めむ)
    And hope that you will be reborn in the tree in the world after
    (来世は植うる樹に生まれ変れと)
    I talk to a piece of your bones in the middle of my palm
    (手に握る一片の骨に語りかけて)
    And bury it in the earth and say "I wish you to be reborn in a tree"
    (樹に生まれかしと土に埋むる)
    The second poem was a composition to honor the death of her husband during his first death anniversary:
    Following the mountain path, there is the tree burial cemetery of my deceased husband and I
    (山道をたどりて樹木葬墓地の亡夫の墓)
    Light pierces through the leaves of a tree and our grave is deeply quiet
    (木漏れ場のもと深く鎮もる)
    Yearning for you, I come to the village of the fireflies
    (君恋ひて蛍の里を訪めゆきて)
    I feel comforted while following the green traces [of you]
    (青き軌跡を追ひて慰む)

11. The terms "heal" or "healing" were particularly popular in Japan during the 1990s. Among the people of tree burial, several of my informants have used these terms to express their relief after having found a grave at tree burial. This sense of relief might express the torment they suffered while searching for a grave of their own. Finally, one of my informants referred to the cemetery of tree burial as a place of healing.

12. Similar claims of individualization seem paramount in English funerals. However, death specialists remark that even though people think of "one's own death," research proves that the process of dying and memorialization remains above all a social process (Walter 1994).

13. The concept of *furusato* has another more ideological meaning. In this case, *furusato* is not a bounded area but a concept whereby an individual or a

group (i.e., Japanese people) search for the origins of their traditions, their spirit or heart, or any other aspect of Japanese culture (Robertson 1991; Ivy 1995; Yano 2002).

14. This finding is not surprising where the idea of self, ideologically and practically, is tied to the social. Long argues that the idea of self in Japan "insists that a person cannot be considered as a set of individual characteristics, but rather is inseparable from the power and meanings of social relationships" (Long 2005, 384). What is distinctive of tree burial is that the customary boundary between the inner circle (*uchi* 家) and the outer circle (*soto* 外) of the self are being renegotiated through new relationships formed through their membership in tree burial (see Hendry 2013, 42–44).

15. Today, almost 80% of deaths in Japan take place at the hospital (Long 2013, 52).

16. For another example of this shift, see Rowe (2000) "Stickers for Nails" in which he reports on the metamorphosis of Japanese crematoriums since the 1960s. Drawing on his observations, his comparative analysis contrasts pre- and post-war crematoriums.

17. According to Suzuki (2003, 51), community and commercial funerals are given two distinctive appellations. They are respectively referred to as "funeral ritual" (*sōshiki* 葬式) and "funeral ceremony" (*sōgi* 葬儀). She believes that this distinction reflects that the shift from funeral as a rite of passage to the world of the dead to the celebrations of an individual life.

18. In the case of *shizensō*, however, its leaders reject also the hegemony of Buddhist priests working in partnership with commercial funeral companies (Boret 2011).

19. In her ethnography of the brain death issue, Lock reviews the legislation and practice regarding organ transplants. Even if a deceased has request that his/her organs be used for transplantation, the author reports that legally and in practice the family has the right to cancel the donation (Lock 2002, 180).

20. In their investigation of new tree burial in England (i.e., Natural Burial), Clayden et al. report on the popularity of the level of personalization provided in this new burial practice. The authors conclude that "the unique individuality of both the dead and the living and their mutual attachment, key features of a nineteenth century Romantic framing of death…thus appear to persist within the cultural imaginary being drawn" in natural burial grounds (Clayden et al. 2010, 162).

21. A similar point has also been made by anthropologists with regard to contemporary cemeteries in the United Kingdom. Prendergast et al. report that most people refuse to bury the remains of the deceased in impersonal graveyards and gardens of remembrance attached to crematoriums to challenge the "existing order of professional expertise and regulation" (Prendergast et al. 2006, 895). More specifically, Clayden et al. reveal that subscribers of natural

burial, the English counterparts of tree burial members, choose this practice partly as a means of doing away with funeral professionals and regaining control over memorialization (Clayden et al. 2010).

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252 S.P. BORET

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Remembering the Dead: Agency, Authority, and Mortuary Practices in Interreligious Families in the United States

Susan Orpett Long and Sonja Salome Buehring

All societies have rules and customary practices that constitute an ethical framework for the treatment of the newly deceased's body and spirit, and for memorialization of the dead by the living. Underlying these explicit rules are sets of assumptions about personhood and about social relationships. Like all aspects of culture, these change over time, reflecting contemporary ideas about personal agency and cultural authority.[1] New ideas and assumptions may lead to the questioning of customary rules and practices; challenges to the explicit expectations may contribute to broader change in understandings of agency and authority.

Over the history of the United States, core ethics of the Judeo-Christian tradition have established a baseline for mortuary practice, while the ways they are expressed have varied over time and from one community to another. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when

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the United States was a largely rural society, knowledge and skills needed to prepare the body for burial and carry out what was considered proper ritual was available to all adults of the community. Family members and neighbors took care of the funeral activities;[2] sometimes if they were available, people would obtain the assistance of a cabinet maker to construct a simple coffin and of a minister to lead prayers. By the mid-nineteenth century, the United States was more urban, more capitalist, more ethnically diverse, and more affected by romantic and scientific understandings of death; funeral practices changed partially and gradually in response.

Laderman (1996) points to the significance of historical events in reshaping the American mortuary landscape in the mid- to late nineteenth century, in particular the increased technological skill and desirability of embalming. When Civil War soldiers died far from home, families often had the body embalmed so that it could be returned to his home and viewed by survivors. The funeral train following the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln that carried his embalmed body across the country for viewing by hundreds of thousands of people increased the widespread acceptance of the practice. While acknowledging ideological and technological change, Farrell (1980) focuses instead on the economic basis of change in American mortuary practices. In the context of increasing industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, as well as professionalization of various trades in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, undertakers and casket makers began to organize, responding to the threat posed by mass production of caskets at industrial companies. They took advantage of new technological, (popular) scientific, and cultural possibilities to redefine an expanded role for themselves in American mortuary ritual. They sold their services to bereaved families as suppliers of an increasing number of funerary products and as providers of local needs such as transportation. Calling themselves "funeral directors," they created a professional organization intended to raise their status and guarantee their income. When a death in the family occurred, relatives turned to a funeral director to prepare the body and handle arrangements, while clergy people conducted the funeral itself and provided counseling to mourners. Both the funeral home and the religious institution were often, in early-twentieth-century urban America, associated with a particular religious and ethnic group, and it is this combination of religion, ethnicity, and reliance on professional expertise that many Americans today refer to as a "traditional" funeral.

Mortuary practices based on religious ritual and professional funeral directors' services remain common in the United States in the early twenty-first century. However, since the mid-twentieth century, significant changes have occurred in technology, the commercialization of death, and death-related ideology. More recently, the increased value placed on individual autonomy and the democratization of authority related in part to social media have laid the foundations for the emergence of new *understandings* of death, personhood, and ritual. These large-scale cultural changes also form the basis for modified and alternative mortuary and memorial *practices* consistent with those new understandings[3] (see Kneese, this volume, as an example). British sociologist Tony Walter claims that the new "revivalist" options and the contemporary social discourse on death are in part a response to the medicalization of death, but are not merely matters of recovering past death practices from an era prior to scientific medicine. Rather, they represent a radical change that locates authority in the individual rather than in the community or in expert knowledge. Hospice, psychological bereavement counseling, and personalized funerals are forms of practice that presume that the dying person engages in a personal, reflexive journey and establishes individual control of the dying process (Walter 1994, 2014), more consistent with psychological discourse and postmodern ideologies than with those of the nineteenth century. As Anthony Giddens (1991) has emphasized, contemporary late modern societies require that people make active choices in order to establish personhood and to define self, including choices about how to die and how to be remembered.

Ideology thus locates authority in the individual, yet decisions are made, and identity and personhood negotiated, in the inherently social and political processes of everyday life (Arnason and Hafsteinsson 2003). In revivalist dying, a scientific worldview imagines the dead as without agency, and thus as incapable of exercising authority directly. Consequently, the dependence on others to validate and recreate a post-death self for the deceased is especially evident in decisions about mortuary ritual and memorialization. At the same time, the authority of religious and community funeral professionals is weakened, becoming only two of numerous possible voices in decision-making, including the person him- or herself prior to death (see Boret, this volume). Thus exists a paradox between new understandings of death as, on one hand, being final, the dead without agency, versus the increasing individualization and democratization of authority in new forms of mortuary practice on the other.

This paradox sets the stage for our discussion here of decisions about death rites, disposal of the deceased's body, and the creation of memories.

Although much attention has been paid to trends such as the commercialization of the funeral industry and the increased rate of cremation in the United States (Garces-Foley and Holcomb 2006; Green 2008; Mitford 1998; Uhlenberg and Hamil-Luker 2001), less has been written about the micro-level decisions of ordinary people in the face of their own death or that of a family member.[4] How are ideological change and new technologies translated into practices, and how do decisions about mortuary ritual and memorialization contribute to broader American cultural understandings of death and its associated activities? Who or what has authority to define the life and death of a person in the contemporary United States? We suggest that inter-religious marriages, which have become so common in the United States (see below), serve as one vehicle through which traditional mortuary and memorial practices are being modified, reinterpreted, and rejected, while alternatives are chosen and diffused in the contemporary United States. Since historical practice was grounded in religious identity, we wondered if the choices of the increasing number of inter-religious families would help to drive change, altering past assumptions about authority over the dead, the living, and the mortuary ritual.

In particular, we suggest that religiously intermarried families challenge the assumption of homogeneity on which many traditional religious and ethnic practices were based. They also challenge the notion that decisions about mortuary ritual in twenty-first-century America are necessarily individual ones, whether authority is thought to inhere in the deceased, his or her family, or an expert. While the funeral or memorial service may be the last chance for the dying or deceased to make a public statement about him or herself, the other functions of ritual – the provision of ontological security, the reintegration of survivors into the community, and the renewal of society (Hertz 1960; Seale 1998; Goody 1962; Grimes 2000; Bloch and Parry 1982; Metcalf and Huntington 1991) – might place contradictory demands on religiously based mortuary ritual in practice, since participants come to lifecycle events with different assumptions and interpretations of symbolic behavior (see DellaPergola 2009; Fishbane 1995; Friedland and Case 2001; Romain 1997). Two strangers, for example, might attend the same funeral and take away two different interpretations of the ceremony, remaining unaware of each other's perspectives. Yet in the context of a marriage, such differing meanings and background

assumptions need, sometimes at moments of great personal stress, to be articulated and negotiated in order to plan and to make decisions about family death rituals. Discussing differences in customs, comfort levels with, and meanings conveyed by rituals may result in the creation of new combinations, new understandings, and new activities of mortuary ritual. And when new versions of mortuary practice emerge that contain important participatory expectations for those in attendance, ritual can also challenge assumptions of authority, normalize new practices, and provide the basis of new cultural understandings by exposing others to alternative ways to act upon and conceptualize death.[5]

This chapter explores these themes through a series of in-depth interviews and discussions with 14 middle-class and professional Christian-Jewish couples and one Muslim-Christian couple of various ages in the suburbs of a mid-sized metropolitan area of the American Midwest. None of the husbands or wives had undergone religious conversion. We also interviewed nine Christian and Jewish clergy people of varying ages and religious backgrounds whose congregations include intermarried members, and five funeral directors—most of whom worked in their family businesses. Some served people of all religious backgrounds; others specifically were utilized by Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish families. We additionally visited four cemeteries that came up in our interviews and were able to speak with their personnel at two of the locations.[6]

This chapter begins with examples of the ways Jewish and Christian textual traditions and customary practices have framed the explicit rules for dealing with and remembering the dead. After reviewing data on trends in inter-religious marriage in the United States, we explore the ideas expressed by the people we interviewed, describing their responses to past experiences with lifecycle events in general, and with funerals and memorialization in particular. The interviews reveal much about underlying notions of agency and authority derived from multiple sources, how they perceive the options available, and on what basis they choose mortuary and memorial practices that are meaningful to them. Contemporary themes of choice, self-creation, and negotiated identity come through regardless of whether an individual's inclination is "traditional" or "alternative."

Our focus, then, is on the social, interpersonal processes by which new options are introduced to people's lives in mundane ways, rearranged, reinterpreted, and weighted in response to the demand for establishing identity through consumptive choices. We find that decisions are made within an ethical framework that offers continuity with

past religious values of respecting, honoring, and remembering the dead, while incorporating ideas of agency and authority based on secularism, radical individualism, and democratic participation in the creation of the self.

Religious Ethics for the Dead in the United States

Jewish and Christian ethics share, along with those of many cultures, concerns that the body of the deceased be treated with dignity (however culturally defined), particularly as long as s/he was a member in good standing of the community, and that the dead be memorialized in some way. In Judaism, a mourner is obligated to honor the dead with respectful treatment of the body, a eulogy, and what is culturally defined as a "proper" burial. Maintaining dignity includes a prohibition on viewing the dead body and thus, open caskets are not part of Jewish funerals. In writing for a general audience, Levine (1997: 98) explains, "Two of the most important commandments in Jewish tradition are to honor the dead and to comfort the mourner. We honor the dead by treating the body with respect, by accompanying the deceased to the cemetery, and by honoring the memory of the deceased."

Marking the loss, honoring, and remembering is partially accomplished through the public recitation of a mourners' version of the common *kaddish* prayer (in Orthodox Judaism, required of certain categories of close male relatives: fathers, sons, and husbands, and optional for others). The prayer does not mention death, but rather glorifies God and thus may function as a reminder of a continuing world beyond the immediate experience of grief. It begins, "Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon." After continuing to praise God, the mourner's version concludes with a plea for peace: "He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel" (translation from the transdenominational website, My Jewish Learning, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/text-of-the-mourners-kaddish/). Beyond the obligation to say the prayer in public worship for the period of mourning, this prayer is recited communally on the holy day of Yom Kippur and on the annual death anniversary as a way to memorialize the deceased. *Yahrzeit* (memorial) candles, which burn for 24 hours, are also lit at those times in memory of the deceased.

Jewish law also prescribes fixed periods of mourning that publicly demonstrate the sense of loss and allow for gradual reintegration of mourners back into the community and to ordinary life (Heilman 2001). The ritual obligation to comfort the mourner to which Levine refers in the quotation above can be fulfilled through participation in the funeral and burial, and also in the ritualized visiting at the home of the deceased or mourner during *shiva* (thus "sitting *shiva*"), the first week of mourning following the funeral.

Jewish halachic tradition lays out in minute detail these ethical obligations of survivors in purifying the body (see Zoloft 2001), burial, distinct stages of mourning, and practices of memorial.[7] Who may do what and the appropriate ways to express grief are prescribed. For example, although women observe the same requirements as men to mourn a parent, spouse, or child, they have often been excluded from the communal recitation of *kaddish*.[8] Comfort to the survivors may be obtained from fulfilling these traditions, deepening faith through practice and reflection, and from the passage of time. Yet this comfort is not the primary reason for ethical practice in the halachic tradition, which is to accrue merit for the deceased. Wolowelsky (1997: 84–94) notes that in the historical debate about women and *kaddish*, the religious argument that women *should* be able to say *kaddish* is based not on its effect on the mourner, but on the benefits to the deceased.

Liberal branches of Judaism share the ethical values of honoring and remembering. However, liberal Judaism (especially the Reformed movement, which originated in 19th century Germany) was founded on the idea that individual morality, rather than a set of rules for action, is the basis of Jewish life, arguing that Jews might rationally choose the observances that are meaningful to them as individuals of the modern (i.e., post-Enlightenment) world. Despite radical changes from halachic tradition, Reform and Conservative Judaism have maintained some ritual practices, notably for a discussion of the ethics of death, including the communal recitation of the mourner's *kaddish*, in some eras adding text specifically to comfort mourners that was not historically part of the prayer.[9] The Reform Responsa concerning mortuary ritual, including questions about non-Jews, have attempted to create a standardized basis for liberal Jewish practice, but decisions are not considered obligatory (Meyer 1988). Thus liberal Judaism greatly simplified communal mortuary ritual, leaving greater space for questions of comfort, habit, meaning, and personal identity.

Within American Christianity, substantial diversity prevails in the way faith is conveyed and understood. Nevertheless, Christian denominations share a core of ethical concerns related to death and mortuary ritual. The key obligations are respect or gratitude for the dead, and the continuity of personal faith. The Roman Catholic and Episcopal/Anglican churches emphasize the proper conduct of rituals, but the focus is quite different from that of Judaism. Faith and intercession on behalf of the deceased are emphasized in making preliminary arrangements, and in the wake, funeral, and burial or cremation services. Following theological understanding of the body, the body of the deceased is to be respected as the former residence of the departed spirit. However, Christianity does not have specific rules concerning the washing, watching, and purifying of the corpse that are found in Judaism. Also in contrast to Jewish funerary ritual, the emphasis in the Christian formal rites-based denominations is on resurrection and faith more than on eulogizing the dead. Family, friends, and acquaintances are expected to provide comfort to survivors by attending the wake and/or funeral, but the words of comfort often point the way to reinforced faith, such as "She is with God," or "You will meet again in Heaven." Rowell (2000: 149) writes that the common euphemism of "passing away" suggests that "North American terminology...reflects a Christian perspective on afterlife." Supporting the mourners by offering prayers for the deceased is especially important between death and burial for it is not only a confession of the Christian community's faith, but it is believed that compassionate intercession may actually help the deceased to "reach their final happiness with God." Catholic communal mortuary ritual aims to offer "spiritual aid to the dead and the consolation of hope to the living" (Catholic Church 1989: 381). As one means to express hope and trust, Christian as well as Jewish rituals often include the recitation of the Psalms.

Other Christian denominations are less centered on the formal church rites, but the link between death and resurrection is equally strong. Funerals of some Protestant denominations such as United Church of Christ are less prescribed in their combination of thanksgiving for the life of the deceased and comfort for the mourners through hope of salvation. The service allows for expression of other emotions, such as in the following text:

> Friends, we gather here in the protective shelter of God's healing love. We are free to pour out our grief, release our anger, face our emptiness, and know that God cares. We gather here, conscious of others who have died,

and of the frailty of our own existence on earth. We come to comfort and to support one another in our common loss. We gather to hear God's word of hope that can drive away despair and move us to offer to praise. We give thanks for the life of *(name)*. (United Church of Christ n.d.)

The service also offers a stronger focus on the individual who died by encouraging remembrance during the funeral of his or her personhood through stories. Such funerals include Words of Remembrance, similar to what Unitarians call "community time,"[10] which encourage the expression of gratitude to God both for giving life and resurrection, but also for the "little things that make us who we are" as individuals, as a UCC minister who was not part of the study explained. The sharing of memories by family members and close friends serves to replace or expand the eulogy, and thus removes the sole authority of the clergy person or single eulogizer to define the memory, delegating it to a broader set of participants.

Although people recognize that time is required to grieve, no extended mourning period is prescribed in Christian or Unitarian traditions. The ethical argument is to return to normal life with renewed faith and commitment. In Christian belief, this is to transform the sorrow of loss into a sense of assurance or even spiritual joy in faith in the deceased's return to God in eternal life, the fundamental destiny of every person of Christian faith. Remembering is expected of survivors, but in the United States, the focus is generally individual rather than communal; at will, rather than as a requirement at specified times, although some denominations have designated days in the church calendar, such as All Saints Day, that encourage remembrance of deceased relatives and friends.

The study of ritual and texts can point to values and guides to moral behavior of a religious group. People's decisions and actions may be influenced by the ethics they learn as they are socialized in and study a particular religious tradition, but of course they are not *determined* by them, particularly in a complex, pluralistic society that offers numerous choices. Among those we interviewed who were married to someone of a different religious background, all viewed the mortuary rituals based on the customs and texts of their religion-of-origin as an option among others rather than as a required or assumed way of doing things. Our interviews attempted to capture not only what they have done or plan to do regarding what they saw as choices, but also to understand the ethical reasoning, values, and assumptions about decision-making behind their responses. To varying degrees, these reflected their life choices as couples in an interreligious marriage.

RELIGIOUS INTERMARRIAGE

A century ago, the rate of marriages in which spouses remained in different religions after marriage was about 12%. In a major study of religion in American life, Putnam and Campbell (2010) show that over the twentieth century, there was gradual but significant change both in attitudes toward interreligious marriage and in practice. As late as 1951, Gallup polls found that more than half of Americans believed that even if people from different religious backgrounds (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish) were in love, they should not get married. By 1982, nearly 80% of the U.S. population approved of religious intermarriage between Catholics and Protestants *and* between Jews and non-Jews. Today, about half of married Americans have spouses who grew up in a different religious tradition from themselves, and about 30% of all marriages remain mixed (in the remaining 20% of marriages, one or both spouses have converted so that their religion at the time of the survey is the same).[11] Marriage within a person's religious group is higher among more religious people, but it is not clear whether low religious commitment is a cause or effect of intermarriage. The preference for in-group marriage is also higher in ethnic communities in which social networks are more homogeneous, yet even in these groups, rates are increasing, as they did for Jewish cohorts born before versus after 1950 (Putnam and Campbell 2010: 148–159). Putnam and Campbell conclude that today, "Most Americans, even in their personal lives, live comfortably in a religiously diverse world" (2010: 150).

Although acceptance of intermarriage of all kinds has increased greatly in the United States, that tolerance is not evenly distributed. Particularly in minority communities, there remains a great deal of concern for high rates of out-marriage, sometimes resulting in rejection or stigma for those who do not marry within the group. In terms of religious communities, Christian churches have expressed little interest in the topic formally, though as our interviews documented, individual leaders have given a great deal of attention as to how to best serve and even attract intermarried couples. On the other hand, as the rate of Jewish out-marriage rose dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century, reaching nearly 50% in the late 1990s, many Jewish leaders and ordinary Jews felt a sense of crisis, worrying whether the Jewish life in the United States would survive. Within the Reform and Conservative movements, debates over inclusion of intermarried families in synagogue life, and the best approach to assuring their children would be Jewish, have been heated and sometimes divisive (see McGinty 2009).

The lack of parallel levels of concern about intermarriage is undoubtedly based on demographics, but it may also be due to striking differences in the meanings of their religious identity for Christians and Jews. In our conversations with intermarried couples, it became apparent that for many of the Jewish spouses, Jewishness was associated with family and community rather than with personal belief. Many consider themselves culturally rather than religiously Jewish. Having been raised in an environment that included education about the Holocaust and broader concerns for Jewish continuity in America, many also brought these elements of contemporary Jewish experience to the marriage. Christian spouses saw religion more as a matter of faith that as individuals they may or may not have. Growing up in a Christian household in the United States, they experienced Christian ideas and rituals as just part of the broader cultural landscape. Growing up in Jewish households, the Jewish spouses experienced the same "American" ideas and rituals as questions of identity, for example, whether or not the family had a Christmas tree.

In our interviews of the older couples and some of the religious leaders, we heard stories of past ostracism of people who had "married out" from their religious communities. However, the middle-aged and younger couples found that aside from the most conservative religious communities, those in such marriages are no longer excluded from at least partial participation. There has been a movement in Reform Judaism, for example, to express public appreciation for the participation of non-Jewish spouses in community activities and in their children's religious education. Nonetheless, for most of the people we spoke with, there remained an awareness of difference due to the decision to marry someone not of their own religion. This sense of difference led many of the youngest cohort in McGinity's study (2009) of 46 intermarried Jewish women to a stronger sense of their Jewish identity than before their marriage, to greater ritual practice, and to increased involvement in the Jewish community. In our sample also, some people had a heightened sense of being Christian or Jewish religiously or culturally, and were active participants in their own, or sometimes their spouse's, religious community.

At the same time, the majority of those we interviewed experienced a sense of marginality in relation to the religion in which they had been raised, not from overt exclusion or discrimination, but from their own lifestyle decisions that did not engage them fully in a religious community. Nonetheless, at times in their lives, notably holidays and life cycle events, people coming from different backgrounds were faced with the need to navigate together multiple expectations and responses. As couples faced

the deaths of family members, they became involved in rituals, beliefs, and values that expanded their experiences beyond those of their upbringing and daily practices. Their reactions to experiences with the customs surrounding the death of friends and family members in some cases reinforced their identities as Jews or Christians, but all were open to a growing understanding of the practices of those of other faiths. When asked about their intentions for their own funerals and burials, their responses were individual but also varied by age cohort. The rules and customs surrounding death represented for them a range of options rather than a distinct set of ethical principles for action.

DIFFERENCES IN MORTUARY PRACTICES

Regardless of their level of familiarity with formal codes and traditional practices, all of the people we interviewed had been to funerals and often to cemeteries of their own religious background, that of their spouse, and those of friends and co-workers of various religious backgrounds. They could easily point to visible differences in mortuary practice and they judged these in terms of their own values and lifestyle. For example, nearly all of the Jewish respondents (and most of their Christian spouses) found the common American Christian practice of viewing the deceased in an open casket during the wake to be unpleasant, distasteful, or abhorrent.[12] They noted that eulogies were more central to the Jewish funeral tradition and that this created a more personalized ritual than, for example, a Catholic funeral mass. Even those who found little significant difference between Christian and Jewish traditions noted that the timing of various functionally equivalent practices was different; most notably, the wake and the *shiva* in their minds providing parallel opportunities for the community to comfort the mourners, but the wake occurring before the ("delayed") funeral and the *shiva* taking place after the ("hasty") funeral. Other differences that were commonly mentioned were the Jewish practice of dedicating or unveiling the gravestone, flowers at Christian funerals, memorialization on death date anniversaries by Jews, and services in the church rather than funeral homes for Christians. Several couples mentioned they had observed that Jewish post-funeral events emphasize food while Christian ones emphasized (alcoholic) drink.

We wondered, since differences were both apparent and judged, whether they thought this would be a problem in deciding about their own and their spouse's death rituals. Could a practice that seems odd or

quaint, words that reflect a different theology be able to provide comfort for surviving family members? Could funeral, burial, and memorial practices done in a tradition different from the deceased person's own upbringing do honor to who that person was in life, even for those minimally engaged in any religious community?

Couples' Ideas About the Rituals They Envision

The responses of the couples to these questions reflected three experiential factors: how they have handled religion throughout the marriage (e.g., the type of wedding ceremony,[13] decisions about raising children,[14] and celebrating holidays);[15] experiences with funerals and memorial services of family and friends; and their patterns of communication, particularly their willingness to discuss the topic of death with each other. These varied with the couple. We also examined our interview transcripts for possible patterns in regard to age, religion, and gender.[16]

The "Default Mode"

One option for interreligious couples is that the funeral and burial of each spouse is done according to the practices of his or her own religious background.[17] As one funeral director put it, "two faiths, two funerals." Our reference to this as the fallback choice comes largely from our interviews with clergy and funeral professionals. The term "default mode" was used by one of the rabbis:

> It's an interesting sort of dissonance for [Jews] who aren't religiously active in their lives, that at this time in their lives when someone they love dies, they do come back to their faith tradition. So managing that and knowing that they may not even come for the High Holy Days, and recognizing that the rabbi officiates, that this is the **default mode**. It's not only that. Sometimes they couldn't even imagine it being anything else, the rabbi's officiating.

As this rabbi suggests, we did find in our interviews that some people could not imagine "anything else." Among the older couples in particular, some had actively made arrangements for their own funerals to be conducted according to each spouse's religious background. As one man

in his eighties put it, "I honestly feel [the funeral] should be for the person who died. That's who he was. He's a Jewish guy, he was in the Marines. Bury him that way. Right?" He had his own funeral arrangements made and the paperwork in a file folder in his desk drawer, where his wife knew to find them. These decisions came from a strong identity as a Jew despite his marriage to a Christian woman. Nonetheless, he saw this as a choice that he was making. Jews who make other choices are not as likely to come to the attention of rabbis.

Other times it is left to the spouse or children to make arrangements. Funeral directors and clergy people told us that even when the deceased had a minimal relationship to his or her religion and had not practiced for years, when it came to the funeral, the religious labels served as the basis for decisions, providing comfort for family by establishing that social identity of the person in death. One of the couples provided an example of this when the Christian wife explained her plans. Her own funeral choices were on file with her church.

> I will be cremated. I told my nephew to scatter my ashes at Rocky River Park, where we spent time as kids. My husband doesn't care. I will take his ashes to his first wife's grave. He said he's ok with that. When his [older] daughter was here we talked about it. She thought it was a beautiful idea.

Respondents who anticipated making the active choice for the spouse based on the spouse's own religious upbringing believed that was the best way to honor the person s/he had been in life. They expected that they would find comfort for themselves in doing things that way. When asked directly about a Catholic funeral for his ex-wife, a Jewish man responded that it was meaningful for her to have a Catholic funeral and burial, that he and their Jewish children thought it was important to provide the ritual she had wanted, but added that he said a Jewish prayer under his breath during the mass. Spouses believed that they had some sense of what to expect from participating in funerals of the spouse's family in the past, and they indicated that they would contact a clergy person of that religion, the funeral director, or members of the spouse's family (most often mentioned was a sibling) for assistance when the time came. This preference for mortuary ritual in one's own tradition was expressed by nearly all of the oldest cohort but by only a minority of the respondents from the younger cohorts. Religion and gender did not appear to play a significant role in the preference for this option in our sample.

Modifying the Tradition

Some people expressed an assumption or a choice of a religiously based funeral that incorporates elements of the spouse's religious traditions and/ or non-religiously based practices such as ash scattering. The person might express a desire for an altered version of traditional practices, for example, a cremation with memorial service led by a clergy person, or a Christian funeral without a wake or visitation prior to the service.

These cases seem relatively straightforward and can be treated as any person's or family's request for variations from tradition, unrelated to the issue of intermarriage. The increasing demand for modifications, including popular music, greater number and length of eulogies by family members, and the incorporation of new technologies[18] has been noted by a number of authors and seems to be related to broader cultural changes that challenge established authority and distribute it more broadly in postmodern society (Campbell and Robles 2014; Cassell et al. 2005; Cook and Walter 2005; Garces-Foley and Holcomb 2006; Grimes 2000; Green 2008; Uhlenberg and Jenifer 2001; Walter 1994). As Green (2008: 3) writes, "This new cultural context presents death as less hidden, less explicitly religious, and more individualized." In an inter-religious family context, drawing directly on alternatives from other religions in the family perhaps provides a useful way to create the desired modifications of past practices. We heard the story of an interfaith family in which a Jewish woman suggested a *shiva*-like time to her Christian sister-in-law who expressed that she did not want an open-casket wake for her [Christian] husband. She did, however, want a chance for people to express sympathies during a limited time period. The Jewish woman explained in the interview that her sister-in-law had grown up in a religiously mixed community and had attended Jewish funerals. She liked her Jewish sister-in-law's suggestion, deciding to adopt it for after her husband's traditional church funeral. In our study, whether or not to accommodate requests for modifications in *formal* ritual was generally up to the clergy person, if one was involved; *informal* events and memorialization were based on personal preferences.

In a few cases, these choices were based on an earlier decision in the marriage to have one religion that was observed in the home, even without a conversion. This option was preferred by nearly all of the clergy with whom we spoke. As one explained, "My big thing in any interfaith marriage is, you need to make a decision about children now; it turns

into a nightmare later on. I encourage them to choose one or the other."
Another advocated that although some parents want the child to decide
when he or she is old enough, "They can't decide if they don't get either
in their integrity . . . It is a spiritual gift to the child to be raised in one
tradition in its integrity with deep respect for the other."[19]

Despite such clerical advice, it was followed by only a few couples in our
sample, for whom one spouse had a strong religious identity and the other
did not (yet did not convert). One husband, married to a Jewish woman,
had been raised as a Christian but from his early teens began to explore
Buddhism and now considers himself Buddhist. He explained,

> I've been pretty strict about it. I didn't want our kids to be confused. So
> we only celebrate Jewish holidays in our family. . . . [M]y family celebrates
> Christmas and therefore we talk about it a little bit, but we don't give
> our kids Christmas presents. I do make a bigger deal out of Hanukah
> though.

They assumed that Jewish mortuary ritual would be followed for both of
them when the time came, but the wife added that she would find a rabbi
who would allow readings from Buddhism to be included in the service in
order to better reflect who her husband was. Thus, desires to maintain yet
modify traditional practice were sometimes created to try to honor both
the individual and the family-as-a-unit. The ability of such families to
achieve this depends on the emerging openness (at least in the U.S. city
of our study) of clergy to perform ceremonies for marginal community
members and of cemeteries to accommodate non-Jewish spouses in syna-
gogue cemeteries or unbaptized persons in Catholic cemeteries.

The Search for Alternatives

The third type of response among those we interviewed was to look for
alternatives to traditional religious ritual for ways to honor the dead and
find comfort. These respondents generally spoke of what they would like
by reflecting on what they had considered "good" and "bad" funerals they
had attended. The latter were those that lacked a personalized eulogy
and/or were highly controlled by the clergy person such that no one
spoke personally about the deceased. Bad funerals for some were those
that had a "dark" or "depressing" atmosphere, or where there was mor-
alizing and "fire and brimstone" from the pulpit.

In contrast, "good" funerals were those that were individualized and in which religious content and clergy authority were minimized. These reflections on mortuary events they had attended in the past are representative of those who anticipated a more contemporary style of secular ritual when they or their spouse died:

> They had a very small funeral with the family and then scattered the ashes at [a small nearby lake]. A month later, on his birthday, they had a reception of 250–300 people in a beautiful setting at a [private] club. People milled around, then the son spoke for about 45 minutes. It was not at all religious but [he] talked about his father, funny things, serious things. It was so beautiful. People cried and laughed. It was touching, sad, but not morbid.

> It was **the** best funeral I've ever been to. I've been to a couple of funerals of people I would consider my contemporaries or my friends. What was best was that it was an open mic; his friends just stood up and talked, so it was a celebration of him. It was about him, not about religion. There was no religion at all. It was a complete celebration, everyone getting to know each other, and people talking. People talking in an unrehearsed way.

One woman expressed, "I think I want to be cremated, and my ashes divided among the two [children] and [my husband], and they can do what they want with them." Another woman wanted her ashes scattered in a favorite place. "That has the soul. It's more meaningful, special, than standing over a decaying body." Another couple said, "We would have a funeral like our wedding. It would be informal." They had earlier described their wedding as "secular but spiritual... No one was put off by anything.... We just wanted it to be fun. And economical." These types of ceremonies are possible in part because of increased accommodation of some clergy to modifications of traditional ritual (most notably by the Catholic church's acceptance of cremation and the absence of the corpse at the mass), the perceived need for flexibility on the part of funeral homes to keep customers happy, and technology that allows for greater individualization.

As with choice of more traditional practices, there appears to be little difference by gender. However, the two younger cohorts in comparison to the oldest were more likely to respond that they were interested in something they did not think traditional religious practices provided. Over a third of each of the two younger cohorts expressed in some way that they would look beyond religious ritual, perhaps asking a friend to preside,

meeting friends at a restaurant, country club or bar rather than having them come to the home, creating a "celebration" that encouraged a more democratic public sharing of memories and laughter. To some that meant eliminating clerical authority or the presence of the corpse, or even a grave or urn. It is ironic that although many felt that Jewish funeral customs, which center on a personalized eulogy and the practices of *shiva* and *yahrzeit* remembrance, seemed closer to what they valued regarding personalization and secularization, more of those who expressed interest in the newer styles were the Jewish spouses.[20]

MAKING MORTUARY RITUAL WORK FOR EVERYONE

Choices about funerals are clearly related in the minds of our study participants to respecting and honoring the dead. As a way to elicit their ideas about how those values might relate to choices in a particular situation, we asked the simple question, "Who is the funeral for?" While some saw this as a forced dichotomy, our lay and clerical respondents alike recognized that conflicts are possible between the voiced or assumed wishes of the deceased and the (varying and sometimes incompatible) needs of the survivors. The clergy were particularly aware of this through experience.[21] Writing for professionals, Sofka (2004, 21, 24) states,

> These situations raise a fundamental question: Who is a funeral for – the deceased or the living? Funerals serve multiple purposes that vary depending upon culture, spiritual or religious background, other personal preferences, and much more . . . . Honoring last requests while facilitating participation in rituals that allow survivors to grieve in a comfortable way may prove to be difficult, but patience, awareness of traditional and nontraditional options, and at times, the wise use of humor, will serve the helping professional well in these tasks.

In apparent agreement with Sofka, all of the funeral directors and clergy people with whom we spoke saw their primary role as serving the living, regardless of differences in religiosity or background of the people involved. Rabbis and ministers provided numerous examples of advice to people facing contradictory needs or requests that these dilemmas should be resolved in favor of the living, even when the mourners were thinking otherwise. They believed that there was seldom a conflict since doing it the way the person wanted (as a voiced request, or the assumed or imagined

way seen as appropriate to that person) was itself a source of comfort for close family members. A rabbi related,

> There was a daughter who died before her mother. She really wanted to be cremated. Her mother called and said she couldn't do it. She could only think of the relatives in the Holocaust who had been burned. I told her not to cremate her, that it was about her not the daughter. But the mother had the cremation anyway.

A Catholic priest described for us the funeral of a Catholic woman who had been divorced from her Jewish husband, but with whom she maintained a close friendship. She had converted to Judaism at the time of her marriage but after the divorce and a bout with cancer, she declared that she was still a Catholic:

> So when she died they had the mass here. But I knew that her two daughters were raised Jewish, her husband was Jewish, her ex-husband, but might as well have been, and 90% of the congregation was Jewish .... I just did what the family wanted. But I knew that for the crowd there, images of memory were more important than images of paradise. And so I shaped it that way, knowing what I know about the Jewish tradition and keeping the memory alive. That was the message that this family needed to hear. And actually there were probably 400 people at the funeral, and maybe [only] 20 went up for communion ... [T]hey wanted a full mass out of respect for their mother, [even though] they weren't going to participate in that piece of it.

Sometimes, however, serving the survivors in an intermarried family means compromises or multiple rituals. These situations are not limited to religious or denominational differences, but are sometimes the result of differences in lifestyle and personal belief. A Lutheran minister told us that although he himself had never done so, he knew of colleagues who attended non-Lutheran funerals of the spouses of church members in order to provide support. Then he added the story of the 30-year-old son of members of his church:

> There was a man, 30 years old, who died suddenly from a reaction to a treatment. He died overnight. He was in San Francisco and had been married only 1–2 years. His parents are [in this area]. The funeral was in California. It was not from any religious tradition. They called it a "spiritual

funeral" in a beautiful place, reflecting his interest in nature . . . . But this type of funeral was not satisfying to the parents. So they asked for a memorial service here. The wife came from California. It was a wonderful service, but the grief was so raw, it was very difficult . . . . The wife was not practicing any faith herself, but it was important for her to be here; she felt supported.

What these stories from three different religious traditions have in common were the twin ideas of families believing they should do what the person wanted or the ritual that best reflected that person's life, and gaining some degree of peace for themselves through this action. If this was not sufficient, support and even additional ritual from their own clergy person was available.

Although the professionals may be more experienced in guiding families in establishing priorities and attaining compromises, the couples themselves were well aware of potential differences in general, even when they had not yet thought much about their own funerals. But when asked, "Who is the funeral for?" their responses were more varied than those of the clergy.

A distinct majority believed that the funeral is for "the ones left behind." As one husband stated, it is for those who attend it, "the guests; the guest of honor doesn't care." Other couples agreed that it's "certainly not for the dead" and primarily "about comforting the survivors." In one of the interviews quoted earlier, the Christian woman, whose Jewish husband had been married before to a Jewish woman, explained that when he died, he would be buried with his first wife, who had died of cancer. She then continued, "My husband says he doesn't want anything [in the way of ritual]. But his daughter and I want some sort of memorial service and to say *kaddish* for him. So that's what we're going to do. He won't care because he'll be dead." The husband who was the Jewish Marine was the only one who expressed the belief that the identity of the person who died should be the only consideration in the decision, asserting "I honestly feel it should be for the person who died. That's who he was . . . bury him that way."

A number of people argued that the funeral is for both, the living as well as the deceased. They explained that the funeral's function is to honor the dead while offering comfort and closure to those who are left behind. Later in the interview with the couple in which the husband quoted in the previous paragraph expressed that the funeral should be all about the person who died, the wife countered, "You want to honor what the person says, but you need to do what feels best for those participating." In

another example both spouses agreed that it is "in part to give comfort [for the living], but part of the comfort is to talk about the good things, the funny things of the person's life." These couples repeatedly stated they would find comfort in following the spouse's tradition. In other words, they believed honoring that person would provide comfort to them rather than creating conflict due to the spouse's different religious upbringing. One wife said, for instance, "It would matter a lot to me to do what he would want to do. That would bring me the most comfort."

The stories people told us about the "worst" funeral they had experienced were also revealing. One woman described her "worst" experience as follows:

> When my brother-in-law died, that was the worst funeral I've been to. It was a Maronite Catholic wake. They hire professional mourners to wail. And they have a big picture of the deceased, you know, like the ones they show on TV of the funeral processions in the Middle East. It was terribly hard on my [Christian] sister. She had nervous breakdown after. My brothers were really angry. No one understood the culture. My mother thought it was horrible. She didn't like my sister marrying an Arab, even if he was Catholic. . . . My sister didn't have any say in the kind of funeral. His brothers made all the arrangements; it's a male thing for them, the men are in charge. So it was really bad for her. It didn't bring her any comfort and made it worse . . . . That was the worst funeral I've ever seen.

What do such responses and stories tell us about the ethics of death and the authority over mortuary ritual for intermarried families? One clear focus is the practical. These couples' decisions are not based on belief in the afterlife of a spirit, particularly not a vengeful one, as evidenced by their willingness to focus on the living if there was a conflict between the wishes of the deceased and those of the survivors. The few in our sample to whom faith was important saw that faith as individually held. From their perspective, honoring the deceased was based not on imposing that framework on someone who did not share that faith, but in respecting the differences, adding a new dimension to mortuary ethics. As the clergy noted, many spontaneously stated that their own personal comfort would come from honoring the wishes of the spouse, even if religious differences would result in a less familiar set of rituals for themselves. Those looking toward alternative, secular rituals found no conflict, believing that honoring the dead though community storytelling and collective memory would both honor the way the person had lived and provide a comforting

Fig. 9.1   A grave marker of a Christian husband and a Jewish wife, United States

Note: This grave marker tells of a Christian husband and a Jewish wife who maintained their own religious identity through their marriage. In other respects, it looks like many other markers in this cemetery.

and comfortable setting for the twenty-first-century survivors. For these couples, who has authority to decide is based neither on an omnipotent God nor vengeful spirits, clerical expertise, or individual autonomy. Rather, it was dispersed and negotiated among the individual, family members, friends, and the broader network of those who knew the deceased (Figs. 9.1 and 9.2).

REMEMBERING

Another ethical imperative for treatment of the dead found in both Christianity and Judaism is to remember, to have an ongoing relationship with the dead (Klass and Walter 2001). Anthropologist Michael Lambek writes of memory as a form of moral practice:

Fig. 9.2 A tombstone of a Jewish husband and Christian wife, illustrating the trend toward the personalization of mortuary practices, United States

Note: This tombstone of a Jewish husband and Christian wife (who is still living) illustrates the trend in mortuary practices in the United States to more personalized ritual and memorialization. It stood out even among the variety of markers in this particular cemetery for its unusual shape and musical images along with the more conventional floral design. In Jewish tradition, flowers are not placed on the grave, but stones suggesting the permanence of memory may be placed on the marker as a sign of visits by the living.

> Remembering comprises contextually situated assertions of continuity on the part of subjects and claims about the significance of past experience. Such tacit assertions and claims, based as much on cumulative wisdom and moral vision as on individual interest, form a kind of moral practice. (1996: 248)

In this sense, memorial observances represent a continuation of the eulogy. In a specifically Jewish ethical context, Zoloth takes the argument a step further: "The life of the person continues on in the presence of the deeds of care" (2001: 204). Referring to the work of the *chevra kaddisha*

(Jewish burial society) in preparing the deceased's body for burial, she asserts that, "By doing this act, we produce ourselves as moral actors. We are the ones who can do the act of stopping for the other, and we can return, internally shaken but heroicized" (2001: 287). These writers move beyond the notion of memory as an individual mental process to an understanding of memory as social practice. Thus the practices of recollecting the life of the deceased during the observance of *shiva* and *yahrzeit*, and visits to the cemetery, the giving of charity, and the communal recitation of *kaddish* are moral not only in the halachic sense of obligations, but as acts of care, of putting the other before the self, or of defining the self through moral acts. Though not necessarily a religious requirement, Christianity likewise views memory as a positive human process. As acts of intercession, prayers for the dead, mass cards, and placing flowers on graves are ultimately moral practices of remembering.

Although most of our conversations with study participants centered on the place of religion in their marriage and family life and on practices immediately surrounding death, we also asked the couples about whether they themselves observed any practices of memorialization. Eleven of the 15 couples had made cemetery visits to the graves of deceased family members. Additional frequently mentioned practices included the lighting of candles and attending *yiskor* (memorial) services and/or saying *kaddish*. Other practices were noted by only one or two respondents: commemorating an anniversary with flowers for the grave, buying a *yahrzeit* plaque at a synagogue, a mass card, and the dedication of the grave marker.

Christian spouses were more likely to visit the graves of their own family members on birth rather than death anniversaries, to go alone, and to bring flowers. But some joined their Jewish spouse in family or communal memorialization. During the interview, a Catholic woman teased her husband that she had probably been to temple more than he had in the past year. Later she commented:

> You know, [my husband's] family visits the cemetery [together] between the [High] Holidays. And our Lutheran uncle has been in the family for 10 years or so now. At some point he decided, we weren't here when it happened, that his family should be included in this too. So although he's Lutheran, his expectation is that he will go and visit all of the dead of my husband's family but that the husband's family should [also] go [with him] that same day to visit his relatives. It would be different if he wanted to go for a Memorial Day

or something and invited us to join him. But I personally find it strange that he has adopted this Jewish tradition and made it his own.

She was at ease participating in the husband's family's Jewish memorialization practices, but remained more comfortable with the cemetery visits and mass cards of the Catholic church in which she was raised. They had not yet faced the death of any of their parents or of the numerous intermarried relatives.

Some couples did not have any particular ritual acts and viewed remembering as an individual mental activity not tied to particular times or places. We also heard a few examples of couples developing their own observances drawing on both traditions and on the specific person of the deceased as they memorialized a parent. A Christian husband talked about the death of his father while the couple was travelling in Europe. He explained that when

> [W]e were planning our first trip to Europe together, I called and he assured me he would be fine. Somehow when we were visiting the cathedral in Reims, I thought about my father and decided to light a candle in his honor. Later that day we got the call that he had died. And when we calculated it, he must have died about the same time we were in the cathedral lighting the candle.

Later in the interview, his Jewish wife responded to our question about memorialization saying, "I have no regular rituals but whenever I go to a cathedral I light candles for them [husband's parents]."

Regardless of whether couples in our sample chose to remember privately or communally, with religious ritual or personal observance, all considered such memory work as a moral act, helping to keep the person "alive" for the living and helping to define themselves as moral human beings. They viewed such acts as based on individualized choices from among alternatives rather than an obligation based on the authority of religious text or clergy.

Inter-Religious Families and Mortuary Choice

Both a result and cause of the secularization of American society, the intermarried couples of our study experience not only the ritual traditions in which they were raised, but over the course of their relationship intimately

participate in those of the spouse's family. The couple's relationship itself challenges the assumption that one's own tradition is "right" or "natural." To respect the agency of the deceased demands consideration of alternatives. Their intermarriage sometimes leads them to discuss these matters that might be taken for granted in other, non-intermarried families.[22] They also made clear in our interviews that understanding the meaning of each other's families' rituals and practices helped them to accept the unfamiliar, and even to find comfort in them at the margins of life and death. As they reflected on mortuary choices they would make for themselves or their spouse, they drew upon these experiences with alternative approaches witnessed at other funerals and memorial services. They considered what would best communicate who they are (individually and as a couple) and how various practices would create the memory of themselves or their spouse that they wished to leave with survivors. These goals represent a transition from concern about fulfilling religious obligation or helping the deceased achieve entrance to heaven toward concern with personal obligation to help create some other kind of post-death existence in the memory of the living or in the application of modern technology to material memorials. The acts reflect personal agency among the survivors, yet require them to participate in a very social process which they do not fully control.

For some, this could be done with religious ritual. Building a post-death self that included identity as a member of their religion-of-origin was dependent on communicating that to others while still alive, perhaps to the spouse or a sibling, or by documenting their wishes with a church registry. Those others were thus crucial to creating the memory of the person, which also necessitated reaching out to make that decision comfortable for those of other religious backgrounds, such as the priest speaking to a largely Jewish audience at a Catholic funeral mass, or the arrangement of a separate memorial service in the spouse's own tradition. Couples also chose to modify what they considered "traditional" practice by incorporating prayers or readings of the spouse's background, or in the case of the husband who supported a single family religion not his own, expecting a funeral in the tradition of the spouse while the spouse was planning to find a rabbi willing to incorporate Buddhist prayers. Individual agency is recognized, but its actualization depends on the cooperation of others to negotiate that identity on the deceased's behalf. For those who chose a single approach or for those who have different rituals for each spouse, the ethics of death ritual (respecting, remembering) have expanded to include valuing the

partner with his/her background even if these are not the practices to which the survivor is accustomed, or knows best.

Other people were attracted to newer and more secular styles of respecting and remembering, especially the notion of a "celebration" of the individual that focuses on the life lived instead of its end or the concept of an afterlife. Walter points out that there are two reasons for the growth of secular funerals: the expectation of consistency with secular lifestyle choices and the judgment of "traditional" funerals as impersonal. The Humanist funeral, he claims and many of our respondents would agree, "is a response to these two problems of hypocrisy and impersonality" (1997: 171). We suggest that it may also be a solution for those who do not share a common religious tradition to the dilemma of the multiple functions of mortuary ritual. For those attracted to the newer, more secular styles, our interviews convinced us that the language of "celebration" is not a denial of death *or* of the ethics of honoring and remembering, but rather a focus on the deceased precisely as a way to fulfill these moral obligations in a twenty-first-century context. In particular, the opportunity provided at memorial services for anyone who wishes to speak to do so, allows a wide range of participants to contribute to the communal memory-making. There is no "correct" version of the deceased, but rather it is the radical democratic process in which each memory or joke contributes to the whole that is valued (Long and Buehring 2014).

Whether the choice of mortuary ritual was religious, secular, or something in between, decisions engaged others to a broader extent than an ideology of individual autonomy over the self would suggest. People strove to make mortuary choice consistent with their decisions about religion and ritual throughout their marriages; clergy people, extended family, funeral directors, and friends assisted in the creation of the story that would define the post-death self. The key principle they identified for making choices if they had to make decisions for a deceased spouse was respect for that person's agency, and an obligation to create through ritual a social memory, a post-death self consistent with the personhood of the individual while alive, whether of a "Jewish marine" or of a fan of the "open mic." They may choose to modify established practices with the assistance of clergy and funeral professionals willing to accommodate requests of a non-member spouse, since the "customer's" needs must be met to the extent possible. In making any of these choices, the couples in our study consciously or unconsciously challenge the authority of

traditional experts and disperse it to a wider community of family, friends, and acquaintances. In their world view, the larger, widely shared ethical framework obliging mourners to honor, respect, and remember the deceased has come to incorporate elements of postmodern radical individualism and choice. Collectively, these decisions about how to honor and remember the dead create a bricolage of contemporary American mortuary practices that mirrors the broader culture of the United States.

Intermarriage is thus both a marker of change to a more pluralistic society that values individual choice (including choice of spouse from a social network not limited to those growing up with the same religious background) and potentially, we suggest, the creator of change. The intermarried couples' lack of shared background necessitates negotiation, compromise, or a search for neutral ground if it is to meet the needs of both spouses and fulfill their moral obligations to the deceased and the community. It is not only that these families are creatively recombining elements from various sources, religious and secular, but also that their decisions are executed in a ritual context in which authority for creating the social memory of the deceased is widely and democratically shared (Long and Buehring 2014). The liminoid setting of funerals and memorial services allows Americans to feel and express emotions of sadness and grief, anger and fear of their own mortality in ways that are usually considered outside of day-to-day social life. The creatively recombined or new practices can potentially reach participants in that state of relative egalitarianism, dispersed authority, and heightened emotions, not with well-known, standardized, and perhaps "empty" ritual, but rather with new combinations grounded in the familiar but going beyond it in an emphatically communal setting. The "new" ritual based on authority beyond that of both experts and the deceased becomes part of the participants' individual and collective experience, providing fodder for judgment, for acceptance when it resonates with broader cultural values, and for their own future decision-making.

NOTES

1. For an extended study of change in dying over human history in relation to cultural patterns, see Kellehear (2007).
2. See, for example, Stannard's (1977) description of Puritan funerals.
3. The complex relationship between material conditions and ideology make it difficult to tease apart the chicken-and-egg argument, but there are historical examples that suggest the importance of material conditions and technological change as the basis for changing opinions, acceptance, and ideologies. The availability of embalming and the development of specialists in its practice developed during the Civil War in response to a cultural desire to have the corpses of deceased soldiers returned to their families and home communities. The technology and expertise for using it was the prerequisite for the viewing of Lincoln's embalmed body by hundreds of thousands of people as his funeral train crossed the country from Washington, D.C. to his burial site in Springfield, Illinois, leading to wider acceptance and adoption of the practice (Laderman 1996). Similarly, holding a memorial service weeks or months after a death, rather than a hastily scheduled funeral, is an attractive response when families live great distances apart (a late twentieth-century demographic change) but want to be present for the service; closed circuit broadcasting in real time is another option, one that is dependent on the prior development of technology to assist with the same demographic reality.
4. Family is used in this chapter in the broadest social sense and may include unmarried partners, close friends, etc. We do not follow some of the popular literature in calling these "loved ones," since "love" does not universally characterize the relationship between the dead or dying and those making decisions about their mortuary ritual.
5. Here we are extending Victor Turner's (1974) insight that communitas carries the potential for creativity and cultural change, which he believes is rare. He states, "[T]he besetting quality of human society, seen processually, is the capacity of individuals to stand at times aside from the models, patterns, and paradigms for behavior and thinking, which as children they are conditioned into accepting, and, in rare cases, to innovate new patterns themselves or to assent to innovation.... I think we have found them...in those liminal, or 'liminoid' (postindustrial-revolution) forms of symbolic action,...in which all previous standards and models are subjected to criticism and fresh new ways of describing and interpreting sociocultural experience are formulated" (pp. 14–15).
6. In addition to numerous observations and informal conversations with people from religiously mixed families, this chapter is based on conversational, semi-structured interviews with 15 couples or widows/widowers. We

recruited participants through acquaintances and utilized some minimal snowballing with the goal not of statistical significance but of exploration of a range of experiences and ideas. In most cases, the wife and husband were interviewed together, and at times the spouses conversed with each other as much as with us. Interviews were generally conducted in their homes, although one interview took place in a private room in the university library where one of the authors is employed and two others at coffee shops. Most interviews lasted from one to two hours or longer, sometimes followed by phone conversations to clarify something that was said or a situation described. The interviews with religious leaders and funeral directors were slightly more structured but remained conversational, most conducted in their offices and lasting for about an hour or more. Both authors participated in each interview whenever possible; about half were conducted by one or the other of us. We wrote extensive field notes and all of the interviews except those at the cemeteries were tape-recorded after receiving the informed consent of the participants. The content was analyzed and discussed by both authors.

7. For explanations and guides to practice, see Lamm (2000); Heilman (2001); Rabinowicz (1964), Riemer (1975), Kolatch (1993), Felder (1992), Goldberg et al. (1991).

8. This is the case in Orthodox Judaism, where even today women are generally not counted to reach the 10 worshippers (*minyon*) required for the conduct of the key portions of a communal religious service.

9. An example from the *Union Prayerbook*, first published in 1940 but removed from more recent Reform prayerbooks is: "May the Father of peace send peace to all who mourn, and comfort all the bereaved among us" (Central Conference of American Rabbis 1961).

10. Unitarianism began as a Christian denomination but has moved away from this identification so that some no longer consider themselves specifically Christian. For example, our Unitarian respondents told us that they welcomed readings at funerals that are meaningful for that individual, including readings that are secular and that come from non-Christian religions, as well as from Christian texts.

11. If marriages between different mainline Protestant denominations or two different evangelical denominations are included in the definition of intermarriage, the rate is 60% originally mixed and 40% remaining mixed.

12. The reaction of the Jewish spouses could perhaps be explained as culturally conditioned since Jewish funerals do not have open caskets. But this does not explain the response of the Christian spouses who were more likely to have grown up experiencing the practice. Both Christians and Jews used terms such as "barbaric," and individuals from both backgrounds occasionally expressed their feeling that viewing the body was somehow especially

inappropriate for children. Several people mentioned that they had bad memories associated with viewing an open casket in the past, and others mentioned that it was disturbing since it was no longer the person they had known. A Jewish wife explained her reaction to the funeral of a former student: "I grew up believing that you remember a person through the good deeds that they do in this life and what I was always taught, and I don't know if that's officially a Jewish belief, but I was always taught that Jews don't really believe in a heaven because you live on in the good deeds that you share with others that are then carried on.... I remember...in particular with the one student that I had, I remember this unnatural face that didn't look like her. Even your [spouse's Christian] grandfather, I remember saying that. This is very discomforting to me. I want to remember what that person did, the good things. And I just couldn't get that vision out of my head of what that person looked like."

13. Most of the weddings, for instance, had been either a civil ceremony or a Jewish one (often determined by who would be willing to officiate at an interfaith wedding rather than by the rabbi of the family's synagogue). Two Christian ceremonies had been performed by clergy who were friends or acquaintances of the (Jewish) husbands. One couple had a ceremony co-officiated by a priest and a rabbi, and one couple had held two different ceremonies.

14. The couples had decided to raise their (common) children as follows: seven as Jews, one as Unitarian Universalist, one as "both," and one currently undecided. Five couples did not have children together.

15. In our sample, holidays were celebrated as follows: Christian only 0; Jewish only 2; both 13 ("from chocolate *gelt* to chocolate Easter bunnies"). In one of the "both" cases, Christmas was celebrated at the urging of the Jewish wife. A number of the Jewish-raised spouses celebrated Christmas in their homes in some way when they were growing up, with Christmas trees or other symbols and observances. However, most of the couples in our sample had current affiliation with Jewish religious institutions: Jewish 10, Christian 1, Unitarian Universalist 1, multiple affiliations 1, no affiliation 2.

16. The purpose of this study was exploratory and thus we do not intend to draw statistically significant conclusions from our small sample, but below suggest interpretations that might serve as hypotheses for larger quantitative studies in the future.

17. By this term, or our use of the words "in her own tradition," we are not implying conservative religious practice, since the "traditions" in which many of our respondents were raised were those of liberal Judaism or Christian denominations. Thus, for our purposes, a "traditional" Jewish funeral does not imply observance of the halachic requirements but may, in the metropolitan area where the interviews were conducted, mean a

Reform rabbi conducting a service in the synagogue sanctuary, a Jewish funeral home preparing the body, and *shiva* observed for 3 days only.

18. A few of the new technologies that had been noticed by our respondents were remembrance through social media, slide shows at the funeral home, intranet TV for broadcasting the funeral to family members who were overseas, and laser-etched tombstones that allow more personalization.

19. This was not universally the view, however, among the religious leaders with whom we spoke. One argued that, "Other rabbis would say [they will only marry] couples who will make a commitment to raise kids as Jews, but when the baby is born or even when the child is growing up, things change. So requiring people to make decisions when they are so young – people in their 20s are still questioning spiritually. They do not know who they are themselves."

20. Only two of the Christian spouses expressed active commitment to such a new style or were searching for one, whereas seven Jewish spouses voiced an interest in such alternatives.

21. A number of respondents, mainly clergy and funeral directors with whom we spoke, indicated that the worst situations they had seen of family disagreements were in families of the same religion broadly defined, but in which some parts of the family were extremely observant (Orthodox Jews, fundamentalist Christians) and other parts of the family quite liberal in their approach to religious practice.

22. This was suggested by the fact that even among the younger couples we interviewed, many had discussed if not their own funeral planning, at least their responses to the spouse's family traditions when someone had died. Nearly all of the clergy and funeral directors responded, when asked directly if they thought the interreligious couples had talked about it more, said that in their experience most had, more so than other couples.

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INDEX