

5 Lugbara death

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The Lugbara view of death

For the Lugbara of Uganda death is a frequent and important event. It is frequent in the sense that as the Lugbara live at a very high density of population the incidence of ordinary deaths within a small neighbourhood is high; they occur almost daily within a relatively small area and people are constantly aware of the deaths of kin, neighbours and friends. It is reported for many peoples living in small settlements at a low density that one is hardly aware of death, but in Lugbara it is an everyday occurrence. It is also normally an event that takes place publicly, in the sense that its occurrence is known, even if not actually witnessed, by all members of a local community; and the mortuary rites that follow it are attended by many people whether related to the deceased or not. The Lugbara have few rites to do with birth, puberty or marriage. But the rites of death are important, elaborate, and often longlasting, and lead to the reorganisation of local social relations of many kinds. A death is more than that of an individual family member: the dead person has also been a member of a lineage which is assumed to be perpetual and a constellation of ties of many kinds was centred upon him. A death disturbs the continuity of the lineage and mortuary rites are performed in order to restore this continuity. The aim of this paper is to assess what are the function and meaning of these rites and why it is that such emphasis is placed on them. As might be expected, the Lugbara see this situation as 'normal' and commonsensical, and regard rites of neighbouring peoples, where there may be a different balance between funerary and other rites, with scorn and ridicule. Behind this reaction lies the particular view that the people hold of their own society, its structure and its history, and it is essentially this view that I try to elucidate in this essay.¹

The Lugbara live in north-western Uganda and north-eastern Zaire, and number about a quarter of a million. They are peasant farmers, growing mainly grains, with some livestock. There is great

pressure on the available land, as the density of population in most of their country is high, some 250 persons to the square mile. Traditionally they lacked chiefs, but chiefs were appointed during colonial rule, and in more recent years they have been elected. The basis of their political system has been and still is a structure of patrilineal lineages, and the scale of political relations is small. With the exception of rain-makers, very occasional prophets, and locally influential men known as 'men whose names are known', the traditional holders of political and domestic authority are the elders of family clusters only a few generations in depth. Above the elders authority is considered to be held by the dead of the lineage; the living elders are regarded as the temporary stewards of the lineages, their principal role being to ensure the continuity of a system of social order that was established long ago by the two Hero-ancestors of myth. Elders should not innovate change but protect this order and much of the significance of Lugbara mortuary ritual hinges on this view of their role.

It is convenient here to set out some Lugbara views as to the basic features of death and the rites associated with it. Death is an individual experience or condition that is unknowable and therefore indescribable. It is definable only in a negative sense, as the opposite of living on the surface of the world as a human being. The dead continue to exist, in a mysterious sense, and the nature and experience that are theirs may be described only by metaphor. Other than birth and ageing, death is the only human event or process that is common to all people, yet it takes many forms, the number of which is beyond counting. The time of death is the least predictable event in a human's lifetime, yet it is the most certain of all to occur. It is also paradoxical in another sense, as being both final and also a transition from one condition to another. Being an event of transition, the living must recognise the change in the status and moral condition of a once-living person and at the same time ensure the perpetuation of that status or social personality and thereby of the group to which it belongs. Death is marked – indeed, it is thought to be caused – by the unforeseeable and unavoidable intrusion into society of an external and suprahuman power, that of Divinity. This is beyond ordinary human comprehension but nonetheless the living must somehow control it lest they become overwhelmed by it. Without this intrusion men might have a chance of running their lives in permanent order and predictability. They cannot do this, but must attempt to do so if they are to ensure the perpetuity of their own society, by ensuring the continuing fertility of its members living with a sense of order and authority. Death thus leads to some kind and degree of confusion of social and moral categories. There is confusion

between the sphere of the small local community and that of the wilderness that surrounds it. There is confusion at death between lineage and family order, continuity, authority and fertility, on the one hand, and disorder, discontinuity, uncontrolled power and sexuality, on the other. Finally, people must perform ritual so as to ensure the renewal of order and continuity, even though as mere humans they cannot understand the means by which ritual actually brings this about.²

These views about death provide a beginning for an enquiry into the function and meaning of Lugbara mortuary rites. These rites essentially act out the relationship between men and Divinity. Since men and Divinity are entities of different quality or order, rather than being merely different in degree, men see themselves as ignorant of the true nature of divine power. Divinity is omnipotent and everlasting, men are weak and live only short and helpless lives the time of whose end on earth cannot be predicted. Lugbara have no notion of individual destiny of the kind reported for many other African peoples: as they say when asked about their expectations in and from life, 'Who can know these things?'

The person and Divinity

In this context there are first two questions that must be asked of the Lugbara: What is a human being? That is, what is the composition of a man or woman? And what is a definition of the event and the condition of death? These questions are closely related and I attempt to give definitions as the Lugbara see them, not necessarily in their own words but nonetheless using their own notions and concepts.

Like all peoples, the Lugbara are interested in the nature of a living member of society, in the differences in the nature of persons whether male, female, adult or child, and in the relationship of persons with Divinity who creates them and in one way or another, and in one form or another, destroys them or allows them to be destroyed. Their notions of a living and bounded person and a timeless and unbounded Divinity are complementary.

In Lugbara thought there are certain elements that compose a person.³ Not every human being is attributed all of them, and humans may pass through phases in which they temporarily lack one or two of them, such as phases of possession, trance or dream. An individual has first a body (*rua*) composed of limbs, organs and so on. At death this becomes a corpse (*avu*), is placed in a grave or in some cases

thrown into the bushland and then rots away and becomes dust: *de'bo*, 'it is finished'. The body contains blood (*ari*), movement of which is a sign of life.

There are also several immaterial or psychological elements. Perhaps the most important is that known as *orindi*, which I translate as 'soul'. This element endows its possessor with a sense of lineage, family and neighbourhood responsibility (but particularly the first), which increases with age. Men have souls but the position with regard to women is uncertain. Those who are first-born and so genealogically ambivalent are thought to possess souls if they live long but other women are thought not to do so. After death the soul is treated in various ways that I mention below and becomes what I call a ghost, *ori*. The word *orindi* means something like 'the essence of the ghost'; that is to say, a ghost is a responsible member of the lineage.⁴ Besides the soul there is the element known as *adro*, the word used for Divinity and for spirits of many kinds. Every individual carries *adro*, which we may translate as 'spirit', a sign of his or her divine creation. It is associated particularly with individual or idiosyncratic behaviour and in various ways is opposed to the soul. Women may have powerful spirits and so do witches: the spirit is the seat of behaviour that is unconcerned with lineage responsibility and so is associated with irresponsibility and anti-social behaviour. After death a spirit leaves the body to dwell in the bushland away from the inhabited compounds in the form of a diminutive man or woman. The third element is that called *tali*, which might, not very satisfactorily, be translated as 'personality' or 'influence'. *Tali* may also develop in strength during a person's lifetime and enables him or her to influence other people. After death it joins a collectivity of lineage *tali*.⁵ Lastly, an individual possesses breath (*ava*), a sign of life that vanishes into the air or wind at death, and a shadow (*endrilendri*) that also vanishes at death. These are not very important notions.

These Lugbara notions must be set in the context of their views about moral space, the 'home' and the 'outside'. The Lugbara distinguish three levels of existence or experience: that of the sky or universe, that of the surface of the world, and that of the individual bounded by his body. In the sky dwells Divinity, *Adroa* the Creator; on the surface of the world dwells *Adro*, the immanent aspect of Divinity, and the spirits of dead people, also called *adro* or *adroanzi* (literally, 'spirit children'); within the individual is his or her spirit, *adro*.⁶ The Creator Divinity, *Adroa*, created the world and set human beings on it; after several generations these human beings became social beings and society was formed by them as it is today, or at least as it should be were no changes

to threaten or destroy it.⁷ Throughout the myths of creation and the formation of society runs the distinction between the 'home', *akua* (literally 'in the compound'), and the 'outside', *amve* ('outside') or *asea* ('in the grass'). On the surface of the world are the compounds and settlements, occupied by social beings living in lineage groups and bound by proper authority; outside them are the areas of bushland or wilderness, places of divine power and lacking social or moral authority. Between lie the cultivated fields and the areas of grazing land. A similar *schema* is found within the person: the soul is inside, as it were central and fixed; the spirit is volatile and not central in a moral sense. Good is 'inside', evil is 'outside'; stability is 'inside', change is 'outside'.⁸ Above and apart from all is the sky, where dwells the Creator Divinity. Lugbara say that Divinity is all-good or comprises both good and evil: these statements express the belief that *Adroa* is omnipotent.

Besides doubts as to whether women have souls, there are other differences in Lugbara thought between men and women. Men are said to be 'inside', as *'ba akua*, 'people of the home', and women to be 'outside', as *afa asea*, 'things of the bushland': women are not considered to be full 'persons'. But their moral position is more complex than this simple dichotomy suggests. They are ambiguous, belonging both to the bushland and also to the home. They are born as daughters and sisters in the home but they move elsewhere as wives and mothers. They are both 'good', *onyiru*, when they accept the authority of fathers and husbands, but are said also to be 'evil', *onzi*, a complex notion that refers basically to being mystically associated with power that comes from Divinity, as contrasted to authority, an attribute of men. The essential point here is that women, as possessors of a divine or divinity-like power of procreation (also called *adro*), are dangerous to society unless this power is controlled by men. Their sexuality, if uncontrolled, is destructive of ordered social life. If it is controlled by those who are given authority over them – their fathers and husbands – then it provides part of the basis for lineage continuity: it is transformed into fertility, a very different notion. At marriage the bride is formally blessed with his spittle by her father before she goes to her husband: if he does not do this or does so with a 'bad heart' then she will not become pregnant; and divorced women and young widows are said (by both men and women) to be likely to behave in a sexually promiscuous way with many men, but not to conceive until they remarry or are properly inherited. This distinction and complementarity of men and women is seen in the Lugbara myth of creation,⁹ in which the two Hero-ancestors come from the wilderness

into Lugbaraland; with each of them is a sister's son and a bull. Each has buffalo meat that he has killed but no fire. The sister's son spies smoke in the distance, seeks out its source and finds a leper woman with a fire. They cook the buffalo meat and share it; the Hero cures the woman with his magic, and by restoring her missing nose, fingers and toes makes her complete; he impregnates her; her brothers appear and threaten him with spears; he calls up his bull and other cattle and pays bridewealth; the leper woman becomes the mother of one of the clan-founders. Thus are instituted marriage, the legitimate use of force, and legitimate sexuality and fertility on behalf of clan and lineage. The theme of the uncontrolled and 'wild' female sexuality contrasted to legitimate fertility controlled by men is obvious, and the former is associated with incompleteness and barrenness. The widely occurring link between sexuality and fire is also clearly made: like sexuality, once tamed, fire is also at the centre of ordered social life.¹⁰ There are certain occasions when this aspect of women's moral status is manifest publicly, and these are considered by men to be dangerous to them and are feared by them. They include certain women's dances known as *nyambi*, when women dance aggressively singing obscene songs that ridicule men, and occasions when women behave promiscuously when they are referred to as *azazaa*; this word is also used for those girls who at puberty run naked in the bushland as a sign that they are called by Divinity to become diviners.

The nature of death

I wrote above that the Lugbara regard death as the consequence of the intrusion of Divinity into the sphere of men and the 'home'. They say that death can only be decided upon and brought about by Divinity: witches and sorcerers can in mysterious ways invite Divinity to cause a person's death but they cannot by their own actions actually bring it about. This is done only by Divinity, whose motives and reasons cannot be known by ordinary people.

To define death in a few words cannot very meaningfully be done in Lugbara other than by the use of metaphor. The word *dra* is both verb and substantive, meaning both to 'die' and 'death': a dead person is *'ba drapiri*, 'a person who dies'. So we must look at what the Lugbara say actually happens at death, at different kinds and occasions of death, and at what they themselves do when someone dies. At death the various elements that make up a person are thought to be dispersed and some of them are then relocated by the performance of certain rites. The body becomes a corpse, is placed in the ground and then

dissolves into dust in the soil. After the physical death of a man the body is washed and shaved, the hair being taken to be buried somewhere in the bushland, like all body hair removed at various occasions, whether ritual or not. This is done by the widows' co-wives or those of the deceased's brothers. It is said that as they gave birth to children for the living men of their husbands' lineage so they do for the dead of that lineage. The corpse is then wrapped in an ox hide or, more usually today (unless the deceased is an elder whose position is likened to that of a bull in a herd), in white calico. It is placed in the grave by sisters' sons, where it lies in a recess and protected by granite slabs. The bodies of women are also washed and shaved but apart from being dressed in fresh pubic leaves 'from respect' they need not be wrapped in cloth although this is often done, again 'for respect'. The body is placed on its right or left side according to whether a man or a woman; the head points to one of the two 'sacred' mountains in the centre of the plateau according to its clan.¹¹ Certain objects that symbolise its status as a man or woman are placed with it,¹² and properly its hut broken and no longer occupied. The grave is marked with stones but soon hoed over and forgotten, except for that of an elder which is traditionally planted with a fig tree that stands for many years and is named for the dead man. There is no notion of a journey to the land of the dead, and when the corpse is buried the agnatic kin spit on it and curse and mock it as no longer having status or authority: but they place the corpse correctly to show 'respect', *ru*. The spitting removes the individuality from the corpse: it is now nothing but a former vehicle for the soul spirit, and *tali* that have given it identity while alive. Not all corpses are buried: those of infants, lepers and people killed by lightning are traditionally merely thrown into the bushland – I return to a consideration of these cases below.

The dispersal of the various elements of a dead person is all-important, and there are significant differences in this regard between them. The breath goes from the body into the air or wind (*oli*), where it remains, above the surface of the earth, invisible and of no further importance. The soul goes to the sky where it joins, or rejoins, Divinity in a way that living people say they do not understand. At some time afterwards, up to a year, when the succession to the deceased's lineage status has been decided (this should include the inheritance of widows, which may take some time), and when it is clear that the soul is not trying to contact the living by appearing as a spectre (*atri*) or in dreams, a diviner performs the rite of *orindi ti zizu*, 'contacting the mouth of the soul'. This is also known as *agu drapi'bori en azu*, 'raising

the man who has died'. The diviner, using a divining gourd to put herself into a trance, contacts the soul, slaughters a ram (a beast associated in sacrifice with Divinity, because the soul is at that time with Divinity in the sky) and anoints with its blood members of the deceased's family. A shrine is then built for the soul and placed under the granary of the first wife of the deceased's son, where sacrifices will later be made to the ghost. By this rite the soul is redomesticated and transformed into a ghost, a responsible member of the lineage and able to know what lineage members are doing and thinking and to control them through sending them sickness.¹³

The spirit, *adro*, is an aspect of the collective power that is Divinity, outside the home in the wilderness and the sky. At death, this power is thought to enter the 'inside' sphere of social life. The individual spirit then wanders into the bush where it remains with the immanent aspect of Divinity, *Adro*, and is merged into a collectivity of the spirits of all the dead, known as *adroanzi* (literally 'spirit-children', a collective plural form), the little figures formed like men and women that live near river beds and protect raingroves. They are not named individually and they do not resemble in appearance any actual dead people. The *tali* goes to the sky and then joins a collectivity of lineage *tali*, and shrines are placed for this collectivity in the lineage compounds where they may be contacted by offerings. The degree and kind of contact that may be made with these elements by the living differ in one important respect. Men may talk with the ghosts, by actual speech used in invoking them both at sacrifice of blood and meat or in the case of a senior man without sacrifice. The *tali* may be given bloodless offerings without actual invocation in words. The spirits may be given bloodless offerings, but only by individuals who have been possessed by them,¹⁴ and without words being spoken. There is also a difference in their spatial positions after they are dispersed. The elements that are concerned with responsibility, the soul and the *tali*, remain on the surface of the world and the space immediately beneath it, although they first visit the sky, the place of Divinity. The spirit goes to the bushland outside the compounds.

The occasions of death

I turn now to the kinds and occasions of death. First we must distinguish between what may be called physical and social death. Physical death, for the Lugbara, occurs when the body stops drawing breath and the blood stops circulating and begins to coagulate. The body grows cold to the touch and soon begins to smell. The breath goes

immediately, and at some time about which Lugbara are uncertain the psychological elements disperse from being together within the living body. However, since they cannot be seen it is thought that they may often hang about the place of death for some time, and the soul may then be seen as a spectre, something greatly feared. As in all situations of transition, they pass through a stage of seclusion and of non-belonging to any proper sphere. But the Lugbara say that this is all they know about how this process actually happens.

Social death is more complex. It refers to the extinguishing of the present social identity of the deceased and its transformation into another. We come here to the transition from a living member of a lineage and neighbourhood into a dead member of these groupings. While alive an adult man is the centre of a cluster of ties, of duties and of obligations. If the elder of a minimal lineage he is the link between the living and the dead members, and the ties of authority and obedience within the lineage group centre upon him; he is the focus of a network of kin and neighbourhood ties of many kinds, including those with the dead. Even if he is not a lineage elder, once he acquires a wife and children he may also enter into direct relations with the dead through the process of ghost invocation and sacrifice.

The mortuary rites, which I describe below, form a set of transition rites. To undergo a rite of transition one must be in the right place and have the right status to begin with or one cannot change it into a new one. Ideally a man should die at the correct time, in the correct place, and in the correct manner. If these conditions are satisfied then the process of his transformation into an ancestor and ghost can start immediately and be carried out peacefully and without rancour or disagreement on his part (as evidenced by his appearing in dreams or as a spectre) or on that of his living kin (as evidenced by their quarrelling over his property or offices).

A man should die in his hut, lying on his bed, with his brothers and sons around him to hear his last words; he should die with his mind still alert and should be able to speak clearly even if only softly; he should die peacefully and with dignity, without bodily discomfort or disturbance; he should die at the time that he has for some days foreseen as the time of his death so that his sons and brothers will be present; he should die loved and respected by his family. He should die physically when all these conditions have been or can be fulfilled and when he is expected to do so because he has said his last words and had them accepted by his kin and especially by his successor to his lineage status. The successor then steps outside the deceased's hut and

calls the latter's *cere*. The *cere* is a falsetto whooping cry whose 'melody' is that of certain words that make a phrase 'belonging' to the 'owner' and which is unique to a particular man or woman. It may never be called by anyone else other than his successor on this single occasion. It then marks the death, physical and social, and the actual moment of succession. All this does often happen in the proper way, and even if it does not in a strict sense it is perhaps usually thought to have happened. Often all has been done to ensure a proper social death and then the dying man refuses to die and lingers on. This is not serious and provided that the lingering is not too prolonged no one worries about it unless the deceased comes later in dreams or as a spectre. The mortuary rites are performed as though he were physically dead. When the physical and social deaths are reasonably proper and congruent, then it is said that the person dies a good death, *dra onyiru*, one that Divinity the Creator in the sky has decided. When they are not so then it is said that he dies a bad death, *dra onzi*, which is associated rather with *Adro*, the evil and immanent aspect of Divinity that dwells in the bushland.

Let us look at the occasions of bad death. Essentially a bad death takes place when the psychological elements of the person do not disperse properly and at the same time, or they do so at a wrong time or in a wrong place. The Lugbara word that I here translate as 'wrong' is *onzi*, 'evil' or 'dangerous', a complex notion. The occasions for a bad death are many but they have two characteristics in common. They occur in some way 'outside', *amve*, and they are unforeseen and unexpected: even though the time of death is unforeseen in general, some forms of death are less expected than others. For a man they include death when outside the home, *aku*, when in the bushland when hunting or when killed (in the past) in feud or warfare; when killed in homicide away from one's compound and before one's proper time; when killed suddenly by witchcraft or sorcery and when dying outside Lugbaraland as a labour migrant. As I have mentioned above, the actual death is believed to be caused by Divinity, who is 'reminded' or encouraged to do so by a witch, sorcerer, or other human agent. When one of these deaths takes place the elements cannot disperse or do so improperly, in the sense that they are not in the right place to begin the transformation they are to undergo. The body is in the wrong place to be buried; the soul and *tali* may not easily be able to find their way to the sky or to the compound from which their journey should start, and more importantly they may not wish to do so as they have been insulted. The spirit also may get lost in finding its way back to the

compound from which there is a proper path to the bushland for it to take. A man dying a bad death cannot speak his last words to his successor who therefore cannot utter the *cere* call to mark the orderly succession. There is uncertainty about the proper beginning of mourning and of mortuary rites.

The actions and beliefs associated with the death of a woman are similar to those for a man, except that having little lineage property and usually no lineage office her last words are unimportant and need not be made; however, a senior woman may make them to her sisters and daughters to show that she is dying contentedly. The death is followed, as in the case of a man, by a series of mortuary rites; an important woman such as the elder sister of a lineage elder will become a 'woman-ghost', *oku-ori*, and so the rite of 'contacting the mouth of the soul' will be made at the appropriate time by a diviner. For a woman the most common form of bad death is to die in childbirth. She is at the time surrounded by taboos that symbolically remove her hut from the remainder of the settlement in which it stands, and so she dies in the 'bushland' just as though she were killed fighting outside in the bushland (indeed, I have been told that for a woman to give birth is 'like' a man going to fight enemies: both are central to their 'duty' or 'work' (*azi*), that is, to their socially approved roles). She is also herself in a condition of transition and so not a 'normal' person at that moment. Birth is part of the process of procreation and her power to give birth is known as *adro*. Also for her to die in childbirth means that there is a break in the orderly process from sexuality to fertility, so that control over lineage fertility has been lost, a point that I consider below. The other common bad death for a woman is to be killed by witchcraft or sorcery.

A bad death is defined, at least on most occasions, by taking place in the 'outside'. Lugbara also consider that a person dies a bad death if in some way he or she is in a state of physical reversal. The example that I know is that of a person dying of leprosy or of some other disease that involves a change of skin colour from black to white, or death from burning, which does the same. One woman who died of some such skin disease was described to me as having been turned inside out. To be killed by lightning usually involves both being outside in a spatial sense and also being burned, as well as being struck directly by the overt power of Divinity. Drowning is seen as a bad death, since it takes place in the wrong medium of human existence and also in water which is associated with the power of Divinity.¹⁵ Accidental burial is also considered bad, since death should take place on the surface of the world.

Death and purification

The deaths that are considered as bad lead to a condition of confusion and disorder but without the means for removing and resolving them. These kinds of death are followed by rites of purification. These have as their main function to remove the impropriety of the death and to produce the situation which enables the deceased and his living kin to start the various processes of transition and transformation properly. I need not here give a detailed description of the purification rites that are made for the victims of bad deaths. They are known generally as *rua edezu*, 'to cleanse the body' and *angu edezu*, 'to cleanse the territory'.¹⁶ By removing the impropriety of the death they bring together the physical and social deaths. The main problem is that the deceased has not spoken his last words so that no one can formally take over his status. When he has died away from the settlements in the bushland, or in a battle far away from inhabited areas, something that he has had on his body is brought back; or if possible the corpse will be carried home, but normally this cannot be done. If it can be done then it is buried; in the former case the object brought back, which is imbued with the personality of the deceased, is abandoned in his hut which is then burnt. The expected successor touches it or the corpse and then calls the deceased's *cere*. Some of the earth where the body fell is also brought back, as it contains the blood that has fallen on it and also something of the spirit or essence of the 'bad' place; it is then made harmless by a diviner who performs the rite of 'cleansing the territory'.

There are two obvious questions that arise with regard to these rites as well as to those performed for someone who has in any case died a good death. One is the notion of pollution that is involved and the other is the mechanism by which they are thought to be effective. Pollution is not a very important notion among the Lugbara, but certain things and occasions are dangerous to living people, and we may refer to them as polluting. In the situation of death there are two kinds of pollution, that of the corpse and that brought about by the act of dying. The corpse is not regarded as particularly unclean (unless the death is from a physically disgusting disease). It should be put into the grave by sisters' sons and not by lineage kin; but the former also dig the grave, an arduous task but hardly an unclean one as such. In a good death the corpse loses its identity and becomes as 'nothing' by being insulted by the lineage kin. But in the case of a bad death there may be no corpse, though if it is brought back for burial then it is very polluting in the sense of being mystically dangerous as it still contains the identity of the deceased. This danger is removed by the diviner's rite of

'cleansing the territory'. As I mention below, the corpse of a rain-maker is dangerous in that it is thought to be able to turn suddenly into a leopard that leaps from the grave to wound or kill the close kin who are standing there. The leopard is considered the most powerful and dangerous of all animals and is mystically associated with rain and the wilderness. The notion of the danger of the corpse – of an adult man or senior woman, at any rate – is that it is, until its identity is removed, an object containing the divine power that has brought about the death. The other aspect of pollution here is that it is due to the confusion in time that is involved when the physical and social deaths may take place at different times or in different places. Even where these are congruent there is always the idea that the dead man has, merely by dying, confused time. He has stopped the orderly passing of ordinary time in his own case; this is anomalous and leads to pollution. Pollution is also thought to be due to the fact that the deceased may have died with grudges in his heart or while quarrelling with a kinsman. The rite of 'cleansing the body' is then performed by a diviner to remove this pollution; it takes the danger away from the kin and places it in the bushland or in the wind, the places of divine power.

So far I have discussed only the deaths, whether good or bad, of ordinary men and women. It is useful at this point briefly to consider the cases of two extraordinary persons, the rain-maker and the prophet. Both are human beings but are given attributes that make them very different from ordinary men.¹⁷ The Lugbara hold views about their deaths that make them significant here.

There is one rain-maker in each sub-clan, the senior man of the senior descent line. He is closely linked with Divinity as being able to control weather and the fertility of men, women, animals, and crops. He knows part of the ultimate secret truth (*a'da*) about the structure of moral and cosmic categories that lie at the basis of all social order and history, that is only fully known by Divinity who allows rain-makers and prophets to know or to give out parts of it.¹⁸ When a rain-maker inherits his position he is initiated by 'brother' rain-makers at a rite that properly includes a symbolic burial and a digging-up of the new rain-maker. His initiation is a rite of transformation to make him into the successor to a long line of rain-makers that has come from the clan-founder at the beginning of society's history. By his initiation he undergoes symbolically his social death. When he does in time actually undergo physical death he is buried differently from ordinary men. They are buried near their compounds; he is buried some way outside; they are buried in the day-time, with singing, dancing and drumming; he is buried at night, in total silence lest he turn into a leopard. He is

both the senior man of the sub-clan and also, of course, an ordinary elder of his own little family cluster. When he undergoes physical death his ordinary lineage position has to be filled by a successor; but his status of custodian of truth and the powers of rain-making is not transmitted at the funerary rites but at a later rite of initiation of the new rain-maker. Since he is already a repository of divine power and truth and since he is buried near, or even in, the bushland, there is not the need for rites (that I describe below) that drive divine power back to the wild.

The death of a prophet is simple to discuss: he is said not to die at all. Prophets come from outside Lugbaraland, or at least the greatest of all prophets, Rembe, did so. He was in historical fact taken to Yei in the Sudan in 1916 and there hanged, but Lugbara maintain that he never died and they still await his return even after a lapse of well over half a century. Rembe was the emissary of Divinity and as such was timeless, omnipotent on earth, knowing the secret truth, given all kinds of symbolic attributes to demonstrate his near-divine position. Since he did not die he underwent neither physical nor social death (he had no kin or lineage to be affected by either) and in the minds of the people he has maintained his timelessness and other qualities ever since they last saw him and heard him speak in 1916.

The rites of mourning

Let us return to a consideration of the series of mortuary rites that follow the deaths of ordinary men and women. They restore the state of order and continuity in the lineage that has been disrupted and that is based on the proper control of authority and fertility within the lineage. They are performed during a period of mourning and of formal categorical disorder, in which 'the words are finished', *e'yo de'bo*. The rites comprise certain elements and phases that bring this period to an ordered end at any time up to a year after the death: the actual period depends mainly on the status of the deceased, the more important it is the longer the period of mourning and the more important the proper performance of the rites. The elements include the burial, the death dances, the expression of symbolic chaos, the transition from living to dead person, purification, and the control of fertility and speech. I have already mentioned some of these and here briefly consider the others.

After the burial, or even with it, there are held various death dances, which are the main component in the process of restoring order. They are more than mere 'dances'; rather they are rituals that by acting out

certain mystical processes and events bring about desired relationships between the living, the dead, and Divinity.¹⁹ The dances have two main functions. One is to re-form the relationships between lineages, both those related patrilineally and those related affinally, that have been temporarily broken by the death of the person who was at the centre of the constellation of these ties. By the performance of competitive dances and the exchange of arrows a new constellation of ties is recognised. The other, on a more mystical plane, is to re-establish the continuity of the lineage, as expressed particularly in authority (dependent on the recognition of proper relations of hierarchy) and fertility (dependent on the proper control of the complementary sexuality of women and men). This takes place on two levels, one visible in action and the other invisible to ordinary people who cannot themselves comprehend the mystical process by which it takes place. The latter is represented in terms of the former, the representation by the performance of rites and dances providing a means of bringing about this mystical process.

I have mentioned the invisible process that consists essentially of the dispersal of the elements of the person and their being placed in their proper areas of moral space and their proper relationships to men and Divinity. The visible level involves different but complementary behaviour by men and women in which their respective relationships to power and authority are expressed. Briefly, men dance, act aggressively as members of their own lineages in competition with others, drink heavily, utter mutual threats and sometimes fight with weapons. The men sing and speak words that refer to sub-clan and lineage origins, ancestors, and moral and physical prowess.²⁰ They portray the ideal role of warriors and protectors of the home. Women weep and mourn publicly, wailing with no meaningful words and rolling in the ashes of the courtyard fire that has been extinguished; they shave their heads and cover their faces and bodies with white chalk and ashes as a sign of pollution and association with the 'outside' sphere of death and barrenness. They demonstrate their inherent nature as morally beings of the 'outside', the sphere of divine power.

Certain acts, however, are performed together by men and women. Young men and women use the occasions of death dances to have sexual intercourse, but in a form of reversal. It takes place in the fields just outside the compounds (where it would normally pollute the crops) and it is said that clan siblings may have intercourse together, at other times a strictly forbidden act. It is an occasion of moral confusion, in which women may openly express their sexuality, associated with the wild, a reversal of controlled sexuality that takes place only within

the homestead between married couples.²¹ It is said that girls who do this at death dances will not conceive from that particular act of intercourse. They bring the expression of this sexuality into the cultivated fields, which although not as 'inside' as the compounds themselves, are extensions of them and quite distinct from the real bushland that lies beyond them. Compounds are the place of fertility of people, the fields of fertility of crops and livestock; beyond is the bushland, the place of non-fertility except of wild animals whose breeding is uncontrolled and so the expression of pure sexuality. The people engaging in illicit intercourse are not, after all, animals, but liminal at this occasion; so that the fields, which are also liminal, provide the proper place for this activity.

During the dances men and women, ideally lineage siblings, run out from the dance arena and mimic the shooting of arrows into the surrounding fields and bushland, while they call their respective *cere* and so demonstrate their particular social identities. To utter the *cere* in this situation is said to threaten revenge on the powers of the wild that have caused the death, to show defiance and lack of fear of them, and to show that kinsmen and women stand together to protect the homesteads. They are driving back the powers of the wild that have come near to the sphere of the home by bringing about the death. These two acts (shooting arrows and sexual intercourse) performed by men and women together are in a sense mirror images of one another: the 'inside', protecting the home and observing rules of exogamy, facing uncontrolled sexuality brought by kin dangerously close to the home.

These death dances are known as *ongo* ('dance') or *auwuongo* ('wailing dance'). At a later time, after the soul has been redomesticated by the rite of 'contacting the mouth of the soul' and given shrines, a second series of death dances are performed, known as *abi*. Whereas the *ongo* are performed by groups of lineage kin, *abi* are performed by visiting groups each of which represents a lineage into which one of the deceased's daughters has married. They come as 'sisters' sons', 'sisters' husbands' and 'fathers' sisters' sons'. They dance, are given arrows by the host lineage, and restore the temporarily-broken or weakened affinal tie. If they fail to do this, the daughters may not bear children in future. Their power of procreation was transferred to their husbands by their fathers when the latter blessed them with spittle at the time of their marriages. This transfer is not really considered a final one, in the sense that it can be withdrawn at any time until the bridewealth has been fully transferred, which may take many years and even last into the next generation. The point is

that the ordered continuity of lineages depends on the controlled fertility of the women married into them. In this case the lineages concerned are those related affinally to the deceased, and not the deceased's own group: the death affects many groups besides that of the deceased himself. The groups related affinally of course compose a wide constellation of kin ties, and it is the fertility of this network that is affected. There is also the notion that by showing that the bride-giving group gives arrows (it received them at the original marriages), the deceased's successor continues to honour the original transfer of fertility and by so doing shows that the sexuality of its daughters is again controlled by their fathers and husbands.

Throughout this account runs the significance of the Lugbara notion *e'yo*, which is in its literal usage translated as 'word'. But it means much more than that. It frequently also means a 'deed', as in the phrase 'the "words" of our ancestors were great'. A 'word' is an expression of acts and relationships based on order and the proper recognition of hierarchy within lineage and neighbourhood. When a dying man speaks his 'last words' on his deathbed he is thereby exercising, for the last time, the formal authority of his position within a situation of formal order; he is behaving as a man; after his death it is said that 'the words are finished' when order and hierarchy vanish in the face of confusion and disorder entering the 'home' from the sphere of divine power 'outside'; the 'mouth of the soul' is contacted by a diviner so as to restore communication by speech between dead and living whereby the latter accept the proper authority of the former.

Divinity, the living, and the dead

Let me turn now to the way in which Lugbara conceive the world of the dead. It lies somewhere beneath the surface of the world. The ancestors of a particular lineage live beneath its compounds and close fields and come to the surface at sacrifices made at shrines erected for them. A single ghost may have many shrines distributed among his descendants' compounds, and ancestors who are not ghosts are regarded as a collectivity for which shrines are also set. The existence of the dead is said to be something like that of the living, but they do not procreate, although they may engage in sexual intercourse. They do not engage in warfare nor do they kill one another or die. They speak with one another, although it is not known whether they speak in Lugbara, and they know what their living kin are saying and even what they are thinking if they sit deliberately in the compounds while doing so and project their thoughts to the dead. In short, the world of

the dead has no death, no fertility, and neither the passing of time as among the living nor any particular location in space except that they are beneath the ground near the homesteads of their living kin. However, there is one situation of change, that of the continual entry of newly-dead people (there is no notion of reincarnation, so people do not move out back into the world of the living). The distinction between living and dead is not absolute. There is continuous communication and entry into the category of the dead. The distinction is one between the poles of a continuum along which move the living and the dead, a progress that is one-way. What happens to a particular person who after his death is made into a ghost is that he becomes more senior in generation; he is depersonalised in the sense that his individual characteristics fade away so that he is no longer considered to be good- or bad-tempered as he was when alive; and his appearance is forgotten and irrelevant. But his name is remembered, since his shrine is given his name or it is known who is the incumbent of a particular shrine; and an elder is commemorated in the fig tree that is planted at the head of his grave, which is nourished by his corpse and which is given his actual name. In time he becomes a senior ghost who does not himself listen to living kin but who takes messages from his juniors who consult him about what should be done to keep the living in order. He moves from being underneath the compounds to living under the surrounding fields and then he later moves farther away under the bushland. This is shown by his being given more important and more powerful shrines, the 'external' shrines that are set away from the compounds and visited only by elders and not by junior men. When very senior he is thought to merge with Divinity and he loses any particular location.²² On another level this process is that of acquiring a greater knowledge of the secret truth held only by Divinity and those few whom Divinity permits to know a part.

The notion of time is significant here. The Lugbara accept two kinds of duration. Ordinary men and women pass through time in the sense of growing older year by year until they die. The seasons come and go, and although they are not repeated in the sense of there being a cycle, there is the notion of a pendulum-like swing in such matters as the rotation of crops and fields. Outside, in the wilderness and the sky, there is no duration and there are neither change nor growth. The whole is linked in Lugbara thought with the notion that living communities are bound and controlled by order and by hierarchy: there are recognised, clearly-defined differences in proper authority and obligations of respect and obedience, which develop for the individual as he or she grows older. Order, hierarchy and authority

are associated with and sanctioned by differences in genealogical generation and by age, and depend on the passing of time. Lineage continuity depends also on these factors and on the control of fertility by the older men and women (both can bestow it by blessing and destroy it by cursing). 'Outside' the sphere of the 'home' there is only power, and that is neither ordered nor hierarchical but merely confused and anarchic. The timelessness of the 'outside' and the wilderness is associated with lack of order, lack of fertility, and lack of hierarchical authority. True, Divinity is man's creator but is not higher in any sense of social hierarchy. He is above all social hierarchy altogether.

According to a Lugbara myth men once lived in the sky with Divinity with whom they could converse and share in the divine knowledge of the structure of moral and cosmic categories. Men could descend to earth by means of a rope or a tree. This was cut by a woman hoeing at a time when the people were on earth and so they could no longer return to converse with Divinity. Since then they have lived on earth, each people speaking its own language, ignorant of divine knowledge and liable to death. Once dead they return partly to Divinity, but only partly so. They are both partly outside the earthly system of hierarchy (yet they exercise authority over the living) and they are linked with Divinity in the sense that, as they pass beyond the process of becoming senior and so move slowly outside time, they become merged with Divinity and cease to exercise direct authority over the living. The continuum is between men and Divinity and the dead are along its centre reaches. In various senses they are ambiguous and so dangerous to the living, who must maintain a careful and difficult balance with them by the regular performance of rites of sacrifice. The dead are always moving slowly along the continuum, and the rites of sacrifice and of death ensure that each dead person remains on his or her appropriate point on it.

NOTES

1 Fieldwork among the Lugbara was carried out between 1949 and 1953 with assistance from the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths and the Colonial Social Science Research Council, London. The material was initially written up with aid from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York.

A general ethnographic account of the Lugbara is given in Middleton (1965).

2 General accounts of Lugbara religion are given in Middleton (1960) and (1977).

- 3 See Middleton (1973a).
- 4 I use the word 'ghost' in this particular sense only and 'ancestor' for any of the collectivity of the ancestors of a particular person. Thus all ghosts are ancestors but only certain ancestors are ghosts, those for whom individual shrines are placed. See Middleton (1960:Ch.2).
- 5 The word *tali* is also used for a place where divine power has been made manifest to men, such as a rock that has been struck by lightning; or where a wondrous event has taken place that was due to the immediate impact of divine power. It further refers to the mystical power of blessing that is in the spittle of senior men.
- 6 I use capitals to begin the words used for Divinity or God, whether in the sky or immanent, and the lower case for other forms of spirits or refractions of Divinity.
- 7 See Middleton (1960:Ch.5).
- 8 See Middleton (1968).
- 9 See Middleton (1960:Ch.5).
- 10 Traditionally a new village was established by the elder having sexual intercourse with his wife and making fire on a central hearth, a widespread custom found in many African societies.
- 11 See Middleton (1955).
- 12 A man is typically buried with his quiver, his drinking-gourd and his stool; a woman with her beads, the firestones of her hearth, and one of the grinding stones she has used for grinding flour. These represent his or her status while alive; there is no belief that they are to accompany him or her on a journey to the world of the dead.
- 13 See Middleton (1960:205ff).
- 14 See Middleton (1969).
- 15 See Middleton (1963).
- 16 See Middleton (1960:101ff).
- 17 See Middleton (1963; 1971; 1978).
- 18 See Middleton (1973b).
- 19 See my article 'The dance among the Lugbara', in *The dance in society*. ed. Paul Spencer. (in press)
- 20 This occurs between lineage segments that are related patrilineally. The same hostility is expressed between unrelated groups when in warfare the body of a killed enemy was taken and its head and penis placed in a tree facing the enemy.
- 21 Sexual relations between unmarried couples were traditionally permitted in special 'girls' houses', but without physical penetration only: the sexuality was carefully controlled.
- 22 Such an ancestor is typically one who existed when the particular lineage lived elsewhere before migrating to its present location, so that the site of his grave and shrines are in any case far away in a different part of the country.

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6 Of flesh and bones: the management of death pollution in Cantonese society

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The ritual repertoire associated with death in Chinese society is so complex that it confounds those who would attempt to 'make sense of it all' as a uniform set of symbolic representations. This very challenge, no doubt, is precisely the reason why the subject has preoccupied three generations of sinological anthropologists. One of the most puzzling aspects of Chinese mortuary ritual is the extreme ambivalence shown toward the physical remains of the deceased. This seems to be particularly true for the rural Cantonese. Few who have witnessed a funeral among the Cantonese can fail to be impressed by the fear and apprehension that pervade the ritual. The general aversion to death, and anything associated with the corpse, is so overpowering that ordinary villagers hesitate to become involved, and yet the bones of the ancestors must be preserved at all costs as they are essential to the wellbeing of the descendants. The living gain some control over the natural environment by planting, as it were, the bones of their predecessors in auspicious locations. The bones then transmit the good geomantic influences of the cosmos to the living by means of a pig sacrifice ritual. These geomantic forces, known as 'wind and water' (*feng shui* in Chinese), can thus be harnessed for the benefit of descendants, provided the bones are located properly and preserved from decay.

For many centuries the Cantonese have followed a system of double burial whereby the corpse is first buried in a coffin and left for approximately seven years. The bones are then exhumed and stored in a ceramic urn. Finally, when an auspicious location has been acquired, the urn is reburied in an elaborate, horseshoe-shaped tomb. The final stage may not occur until decades or even generations after death, depending on family circumstances.¹ The bones begin to function for the benefit of descendants only after the final stage in the burial sequence has been completed. Space does not permit a full discussion of the Chinese double burial system in this paper; it is a vastly complex topic (see for example Wilson, 1961; Freedman, 1966:118-54; Potter, 1970; Ahern, 1973; Pasternak, 1973).