Parry, Jonathan 1980. 'Ghosts, greed and sin: the occupational identity of the Benares funeral priests', *Man*, **15**, 88–111.
1981. 'Death and cosmogony in Kashi', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, **15**:337–65.
Pasternak, Burton 1972. *Kinship and community in two Chinese villages*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
1973. 'Chinese tale-telling tombs', *Ethnology*, **12**, 259–73.
Pina-Cabral, João de 1980. 'Cults of death in Northwestern Portugal', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, **11**, 1–14.
Potter, Jack M. 1970. 'Wind, water, bones and souls: the religious world of the Cantonese peasant', *Journal of Oriental Studies* (Hong Kong), **8**, 139–53.
Stevens, Keith 1976. 'Chinese preserved monks', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, **16**, 292–7.
Thompson, Stuart 1981. 'Field report on Ch'ing Han Village, Yun Lin Hsian, Taiwan', School of Oriental and African Studies (London), Department of Anthropology.
Topley, Marjorie 1952. 'Chinese rites for the repose of the soul, with special reference to Cantonese custom', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, **25**, 149–60.
1974. 'Cosmic antagonisms: a mother–child syndrome', in *Religion and ritual in Chinese society*. ed. A.P. Wolf. pp.233–49. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Watson, James L. 1975*a*. 'Agnates and outsiders: adoption in a Chinese lineage', *Man*, **10**, 293–306.
1975*b*. *Emigration and the Chinese lineage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
1977. 'Hereditary tenancy and corporate landlordism in traditional China', *Modern Asian Studies*, **11**, 161–82.
1980. 'Transactions in people: the Chinese market in slaves, servants, and heirs', in *Asian and African systems of slavery*. ed. J.L. Watson. pp.223–50. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Watson, Rubie S. 1981. 'Class differences and affinal relations in south China', *Man*, **16**, 593–615.
1982. 'The creation of a Chinese lineage: the Teng of Ha Tsuen, 1669–1751', *Modern Asian Studies*, **16**, 69–100.
n.d. 'Milk names, marriage names, and nicknames: the person in Chinese society', paper presented at the Intercollegiate Anthropology Seminar, University of London, June 1981.
Wilson. B.D. 1961. 'Chinese burial customs in Hong Kong', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, **1**, 115–23.
Wolf, Arthur P. 1970. 'Chinese kinship and mourning dress', in *Family and kinship in Chinese society*. ed. Maurice Freedman. pp. 189–207. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
1974. 'Gods, ghosts, and ancestors', in *Religion and ritual in Chinese society*, ed. A.P. Wolf. pp.131–82. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Wong Yo-yui. 1939. 'The filial mourning head-dress society in the villages of Chang-I, Shantung', in *Agrarian China*. (comp. by Institute of Pacific Relations) pp.204–7. London: George Allen & Unwin.

7 Social dimensions of death in four African hunting and gathering societies

JAMES WOODBURN

In this chapter I discuss beliefs and practices associated with death in four African hunting and gathering societies – the Hadza of Northern Tanzania, the net-hunting Mbuti Pygmies of Zaire, the Baka Pygmies of Cameroon and the !Kung Bushmen of Botswana and Namibia.[1] Hunters and gatherers form a tiny minority of sub-Saharan African societies and their total population is substantially less than 1% of the whole sub-Saharan population. All of these societies are hunting and gathering in a world of agriculturalists and pastoralists and although each has enough space to be able to retreat for periods of the year from contact with these neighbouring farmers, all are profoundly aware of the similarities and differences between their custom and the custom of their neighbours and of the fact that certain of their customary practices – not least those associated with death – are regarded by their neighbours as curious, even abhorrent. Two of these societies, the two Pygmy ones, are forest-dwelling and two, the Hadza and the !Kung Bushmen, live on the dry open savanna, the !Kung habitat being rather drier than that of the Hadza. These societies are not merely geographically widely separated but are culturally and linguistically quite distinct: if they share any historical connections they are certainly extremely distant ones.

I should start by stressing that members of all these societies are constantly dealing in death, in the death of the game animals they hunt. Death is for them a way of life. Killing animals is a real focus for the daily life of men: every man has constantly at hand the weapons needed for killing, and most men frequently do kill at least small animals. For pastoralists, or for agricultural peoples who keep domestic animals, killing animals is a special activity which stands in marked contrast to the daily care and attention devoted to them; but for hunters and gatherers death is the routine focus for their interaction with animals, and dead animals are a focus for their interaction with each other. Animal death and the procedures leading up to and following it appear, at least in some of these societies, to be ideologically

elaborated although the ethnographic evidence remains fragmentary. There are a whole series of prohibitions and injunctions associated with hunting (especially the hunting of large game), with the dismemberment of the carcass and the sharing of the meat. Fulfilment of these injunctions and prohibitions brings good fortune and breach of them is believed to have the most serious consequences.

Among the Hadza these injunctions and prohibitions centre on the relationship between the sexes. The whole process of hunting big game (male productivity) is symbolically linked with the whole process of female reproduction (female productivity). Activities in one process are mystically dangerous for activities in the other. A man whose wife is menstruating cannot hunt big game because the poison of his arrows is believed to lose its efficacy. If his wife is pregnant he cannot walk on the tracks of a wounded game animal because this will cause it to recover from its wounds. Reciprocally, if a man whose wife is pregnant laughs at or mocks the dead but not yet dismembered carcass of a game animal, the unborn baby will be born with defects which resemble the characteristics of the dead animal (Woodburn, 1974). For the Hadza at least, while animal death is ideologically elaborated and intimately linked with human reproduction and fertility, human death is not. It is treated in a simpler and more straightforward way and the tenuous links that can be established with human fertility are neither developed nor established as part of a wider system of beliefs. At the end of this paper I discuss some possible reasons for this lack of elaboration.

Hadza death beliefs and practices

The Hadza as individuals fear death and display their fear but human death, unlike animal death, is hedged around with remarkably few procedures, prescriptions, taboos or rituals. Beliefs, too, are rather simple, unstructured and straightforward. There is no real corpus of doctrine or of formal practice.

I should say at once that in some respects my knowledge is limited. During the entire period of nearly four years that I have spent living among the Hadza no one, apart from one child who died two days after birth, ever died in a nomadic camp in which I was at the time living, nor was I ever informed of a death at a nearby camp in time to be able to witness the procedures followed.[2] My knowledge of what actually happens when somebody dies is based not on observation but on a mixture of accounts, often somewhat contradictory, about what does and does not happen. The Hadza are not keen to talk about what happens at death partly because it is an obviously distasteful subject

but, even more important, because they know it is a subject about which outsiders are sensitive and which can lead to the Hadza being treated with scorn and labelled as primitive.

Immediate procedures when a death occurs

When a Hadza dies in camp with other Hadza present, as most do, he or she will usually be buried soon after death. The burial is likely to be near the surface and the Hadza may take advantage of an old anteater hole or other site which will ease the labour of digging. They usually have no metal digging tools and, although the wooden digging sticks used for digging roots are adequate for the task, it would be quite a long process to dig a deep grave. Men do the digging, except in the case of an infant who would usually be buried by the women. But in the case of the infant (a two-day-old) who died in a camp in which I was living, the child was buried unceremoniously by a man at dawn in the hut of its parents: he told me that he did the burying because the women were afraid. Usually most of the men in the camp, especially the older men, will dig the grave and inter the corpse but there is absolutely no rule specifying or excluding particular kin or affines. Those who are not helping will stay some distance away. Most Hadza are buried lying on the left side facing a high mountain, Mt Hanang (called Diroda in Hadza) but some lie on the right side facing Mt Oldeani (called Sandzako in Hadza)[3] and a few others face the sunset. Some informants suggested that this last direction is used for people who are not pure Hadza but are of part-Isanzu descent.

The surface of the grave may sometimes be trodden down after water has been poured on it, in order to make a hard surface so that disturbance by hyaenas is less likely. The treading of the grave, when it is carried out, seems usually to be done by the men and to be treated as an entirely straightforward, practical matter. The women bring containers of water which are poured out over the surface of the grave. The men mix the water with the clay soil and tread it down to form a flat surface which will soon dry hard in the sun.[4] Sometimes people are not buried at all but the framework and grass thatch of a temporary hut are simply pulled down on top of the corpse. Even when someone is buried, a hut may be pulled down or the grave covered with branches, again with the idea of deterring disturbance by hyaenas and other scavengers.

At the time of death and during the burial the women cry and wail. People may come from neighbouring camps to join in the lamentation. The men say that it is the women who feel the death most and it is they who do most of the crying and wailing. Only the closest male

associates of the dead person join in and then only in a restrained fashion.

The Hadza link death and burial with their major religious celebration, the sacred *epeme* dance performed in pitch darkness each month. It usually continues for two or three nights in succession in every camp in which there are enough participants and enough head-dresses, leg-bells and dance-rattles. At this celebration the initiated men dance, one by one, a solemn dance while the women sing an accompaniment of special *epeme* songs. The dance stresses kinship and joint parentage and seeks to reconcile the opposed interests of men and women which are so manifest in many other contexts. Failure to hold the dance is believed to be dangerous. Performing the dance is believed to maintain and promote general wellbeing, above all good health and successful hunting.

The dancer is supposed to be not himself but *epeme*, a powerful sacred being important in other contexts as well. The women and children must not see who it is who is putting on the *epeme* costume or who is dancing in it. Usually each dancer dances two or three times, often interspersed with dances by others. Every time he dances as *epeme*, he is dancing for someone. In the first dance, he usually dances for himself. In subsequent dances he dances for someone else, most commonly one of his children – either an actual child or one of a number of objects owned by his wife which stands for a child, such as a specially decorated gourd in which fat is kept (*a'untenakwete*) or a decorated stone or clay 'doll' (*han!anakwete*). He may also dance for other close kin or affines. Unmarried men often dance for their brothers. Or men may dance for other people's surrogate children. I remember, for example, one man dancing for the decorated gourd 'son' of his mother-in-law, that is for a surrogate brother-in-law. After every individual dance a dialogue is held between the *epeme* dancer, who uses a special ritual whistling language used only in this context, and the women who call out their affectionate greetings using the kinship term applicable to the 'person' for whom that particular dance has been held.

The dead are linked to *epeme* in two ways. Firstly, objects associated with *epeme* are often laid out on the grave – in particular, the ostrich-plume dance head-dress (*kembako*) which, more than any other object, stands for *epeme*. Objects which represent surrogate children in the *epeme* context – especially the decorated fat gourd (*a'untenakwete*) – will be broken on the grave. I was told that it is particularly appropriate if the dead person's mother's *a'untenakwete* – which can be said to represent the dead person's sibling or even the dead person himself – is broken on the grave. But, of course, often the mother will be dead or living elsewhere and then some other *a'untenakwete*, probably one belonging to the man's wife and standing for his own child, will be broken. I was also told that to break a gourd on the grave is especially relevant if the dead person is a parent. Everybody abandons the camp the same day or the next day and just before departure the ostrich-plume head-dress and any other unbroken *epeme* objects will be collected up from the grave.

Epeme is also relevant in a second way. At some point the dead person will be commemorated by being danced for at an *epeme* dance. Some people told me that this might happen quite soon, within days or weeks of the death, but the more usual opinion was that it would normally happen months later, after several *epeme* dances had been held since the person's death. The evidence suggests that the dead person is simply being commemorated and not that he or she (or any sort of spiritual counterpart) is believed to be present at the commemoration. The Hadza told me that the person is simply being remembered with affection and that the purpose of the commemoration is not to placate the ghost or to ward off any danger, because the dead are not dangerous for the living. Apparently the *epeme* dance at which the dead person is mentioned is not seen as special or as significantly different from other *epeme* dances. The living will be danced for in the usual way at the same dance.

The Hadza say that it is good if an ordinary *epeme* dance can be held within a few days or weeks of a person's death but that this is not in any sense obligatory. The point is simply that the *epeme* dance is believed to establish and maintain a state of wellbeing and good order and that a short while after a death is seen as a suitable time for seeking such a state of affairs. However, since the dance is, in the ordinary way, held every month and can only be held at the time of the month when there is a period of total darkness without moonlight, there is not much room for manoeuvre over the timing of the dance which may well not be affected by the death.

All these procedures may sound rather elaborate in the light of what I stated earlier; I am frankly not sure how much of this really is usually done. It certainly is not likely to be done in the case of an infant. In the case of the two-day-old child who died, there was no wailing, no breaking of gourds and the parents slept a night on top of the grave before building a new hut the next day. Camp was not abandoned. For anyone other than an infant, camp would, I think, always be abandoned. Interestingly, the mother of the infant wore large quantities of decorative beads for some days after the death: I was told that

these were nothing to do with the death but were to mark the fact that she had given birth to her first-born child. It seemed curious to me that she continued to wear these festive beads even after the child had died. I do not want to make too much of one instance, which may or may not be typical, but it is, I think, consistent with Hadza values that mourning did not affect matters.

These procedures are for people who die in camp when other Hadza are present. But a minority of Hadza die elsewhere and for them, there are no such procedures. Seriously ill people are sometimes abandoned when Hadza move camp in the course of their frequent nomadic moves which take place on average every two or three weeks. People who cannot walk are not likely to be carried for long. They will be left with food and water and with their possessions either to die on their own or, if they are lucky, to recover enough to be able to make their own way somehow to the next camp. Others may meet with fatal accidents on their own in the bush of which the most frequent are snake-bite (a real risk especially when hunting hyrax) or falling from a tree when seeking honey (pegs are driven into the tree and these sometimes break). In cases like these there is no question of mortuary ritual in the absence of a body, which will have been taken by hyaenas and other scavengers soon after death.

Grave sites are not marked and are not visited. There is some fear of pollution from handling a corpse and one of the rare occasions on which people wash their hands is after participating in a burial. I once came upon some human bones protruding from an eroded bush pathway and the Hadza kept well clear and would not let me remove them (I thought, and still think, that there was a remote possibility that they might be the fossil bones of some early hominid!). Death pollution beliefs however, are, unlike menstrual pollution beliefs, not elaborated or made much of.

As far as I have been able to establish the Hadza have no concept of good and bad deaths. Suicide is regarded as very strange but is not marked out as specially abhorrent or dangerous. Many of the younger people know of no cases of suicide but the older people talk of a woman who became depressed after the death of her husband and eventually took poison. People assured me that no special procedures would be used after death by suicide.

Cause of death

Unlike their pastoral and agricultural neighbours, the Hadza are not concerned to establish the cause of death. They believe in witchcraft and sorcery but they do not believe that other Hadza (except those who are very closely associated with members of neighbouring

pastoral and agricultural tribes) are capable of practising them.[5] They do believe that some people die as a result of the witchcraft and sorcery of outsiders, but most people are held to die 'naturally' or as a result of either deliberately or inadvertently eating sacred *epeme* meat outside the proper context. The cause is, however, for the Hadza a matter for speculation but not for decision or action.

Consequences of death (after the immediate procedures)

Human death is believed to have a brief damaging effect on hunting success. During a visit to the Hadza in 1981, after this chapter was first written, I discovered to my surprise that the Hadza have a remarkably similar belief to the Baka (see below, p.196) about one consequence of human death. Two men who had seen an impala from a look-out point where they and I were sitting, ran to hunt it. Both shot at it from close range, both missed and the animal got away. They speculated that a woman whom they knew to be very ill at another camp had died. A death which is not yet known to people is believed to deflect men's hunting arrows so that they miss the game animals at which they are directed. Once known, the death has no effect on hunting but while it remains unknown it can affect hunting for several days.[6]

There is no clear belief in an afterlife. The Hadza sometimes talk of a dead person having gone to Diroda or jumped over Sandzako, the mountains facing which they are buried, but these expressions may be no more than euphemisms for saying that someone has died. Other Hadza are quite explicit that when one dies, one rots and that is that.

After the burial, there is no ban on the use of the dead person's name or on the use of his possessions, no special clothing or decoration or other formal mourning procedures for the survivors. The head hair of the widow or widower, of the children who live in the same hut and of other very close associates may be shaved off, especially, I was once told, if the dead person used to search their hair for head lice, but this is not obligatory. The widow or widower may remarry without formality as soon as she or he chooses to do so.

The property of the dead man or woman is shared out widely among those who happen to be present at the time. As the Hadza say, 'Everybody cries, everybody gets something'.

Relations with outsiders

The much more elaborate death beliefs and practices of their pastoral and agricultural neighbours impinge on the Hadza in various ways:

a) There has for many years been some general pressure from outsiders on the Hadza to behave more respectably – e.g. to bury their dead 'properly' and to give proper attention to the need for divination after a death. The Hadza are cautious when discussing these topics with outsiders for fear of making themselves seem foolish or 'primitive'.

b) A very small minority of Hadza with close connections with the Isanzu, a neighbouring Bantu-speaking people, believe themselves to be possessed, following a severe illness, by *alungube* (the Hadza form of the Isanzu word for 'spirits of the dead'). Men possessed by *alungube* occasionally run naked into the night and are believed to be guided by these spirits to select particular pieces of plant or wood or stone as medicines. Sometimes they may believe themselves to be possessed by specific named ancestors who have to be placated by gifts of honey mixed with baobab pulp at an *epeme* dance. I was told that all this is a comparatively recent importation and that in the past Hadza were not possessed by *alungube*.

c) Another small minority of Hadza assist members of a different neighbouring tribe, the Iraqw, by removing their death pollution. An Iraqw widower or widow has to have sexual relations with and have his or her head shaved by a person of another tribe to get rid of death pollution. Some Hadza men are willing to perform this service. Hadza women are said to be more reluctant. The Hadza men involved are uneasy that they might become ill as a result but appear not to be seriously concerned. I have, however, heard this cited as the cause of the eventual death of one old man whom I knew well and who had earlier readily admitted to me his occasional participation. In payment, the Hadza are given clothing which belonged to the dead person and often money as well. The Iraqw do not appear to mind if the Hadza help themselves to the many possessions of the dead man which are abandoned as polluted.

Baka Pygmy death beliefs and practices

For the information on the Baka I am greatly indebted to Robert Dodd, who has recently returned from carrying out field research among them and who has compiled some notes for me to use. I shall give this material largely in his own words but shortened and slightly altered to fit the requirements of this paper.

A life after death?

The Baka view of death, and of life after death, has been complicated in recent years by external influences which have partly been assimilated by these hunters and gatherers. Such influences have come from the Bantu villagers, who have taught the Baka to inter their dead, and from the missionaries, who have preached about a life after death and who have misinterpreted a Baka category – *molili* – in order to demonstrate that the Baka have a traditional concept of *soul*. When someone dies, his *molili* – the light in his eye or his shadow, perhaps best translated as his 'vitality' or his 'essence' – leaves his body. Traditionally oriented Baka say it just goes away and for ever. *Soul* is not an appropriate translation.

At one level, death in a Baka camp is a personal tragedy. Close kin, especially women, weep and wail and word is sent to out-living kin and affines who will visit the camp of the deceased. If they arrive in time, they will view the corpse and offer comfort and solace to the bereaved widow, widower or parents. At another level, however, the occurrence of a death in a camp has little importance. For, in spite of the missionaries' insistence, and of the stated beliefs of some Baka in certain areas that the soul of a dead person goes to reside in the 'Big Village' (*ngbé gba*), the Baka do not traditionally believe in a life after death; nor do they have any concept of ancestors, ghosts or human spirits. When a person dies, there is an immediate period of personal grief and a sense of great loss, and then life continues as before.

Traditionally there is no search for the cause of death among the Baka. They believe that they can be killed by the witchcraft of the villagers (one Baka told me that *all* death was caused by witchcraft) but there are no accusations and no other action is taken.

Until the recent past, the only mortuary act performed by the Baka was the pulling down of the hut over a corpse; the local group then quit the camp and never returned to that particular part of the forest. When questioned on what happened to an individual when he is dead, conservative or 'traditional' Baka, like those with whom most of the research was done, reported that, 'When you're dead, you're dead and that's the end of you'.

Death in a village camp

Today, if a death occurs in a village camp, that is, in a camp built alongside a village of Bantu cultivators, the body is interred at the edge of the encampment near to the forest and this usually takes place on the same day as the death. The burial arrangements are supervised by the Bantu villagers, one of whom sometimes actually helps the Baka, generally the deceased's sons-in-law, to dig the grave. In spite of the difficult and often antagonistic relationships that exists between the Baka and the Bantu, a funeral is one of the few occasions when the villagers show genuine concern and sympathy for the hunter–gatherers. At one funeral I attended, a villager supervised the digging of the grave and when he was satisfied that the hole was deep enough and everything was 'decent', withdrew to his own house saying that he would leave these poor people to bury their brother and to continue their grief in private.

This man had earlier explained that the Baka until recently had left their dead to be eaten by wild animals in the forest. This he found a disturbing and primitive way of dealing with death and it was for this reason, he said, that he and his fellow villagers always helped the Baka to do things 'properly'. 'They need to have a good, deep grave', he explained, 'so that the corpse can rot in peace'.

Following the villager practice, a body is interred with no coffin. It is laid on an open bamboo bier and completely covered with a cloth. A piece of woven

roof thatch is placed at an angle to cover the face in the grave to prevent direct contact with the soil.

After the villager had gone, the Baka lowered the body into the hole and close kin were led weeping to the graveside for one last look. The soil was then replaced to a level of about 18 inches. Two men then jumped down into the grave and stamped down the soil, probably breaking the protective thatch in the process. The villager would, no doubt, have been upset to see this apparently disrespectful treatment of a corpse. Such treatment, though, seems consistent with the Baka's traditional view that when you're dead, that's the end of you; a dead body is nothing and has to be disposed of quickly and life has to continue. The grave was then filled up to ground level. Baka village camp graves are unmarked and after a few weeks the forest grows over the area and soon people forget exactly where they are.

Death in a forest camp

I was never present when a death occurred in the forest but the Baka assured me that even there they dug 'very deep' graves for their dead. Exactly how they managed to do this without having spades or other digging tools was not explained and I suspect they were giving me the answer they thought I wanted to have.

Death in a camp has an adverse effect on hunting for a while. Poor hunting is caused by 'bad luck' and this can be brought on by a wide range of events – a death, a marital row the night before a hunt, the harbouring of bad feelings towards another person, pregnancy, and so on.

If a group of Baka is hunting in the forest and someone of their clan dies in their camp, then the hunt will be unsuccessful. 'Bad luck' will remain with the hunters for as long as the identity of the deceased is not known to them. If they return to the camp and receive the information that so-and-so has died, then the effects of the 'bad luck' will be immediately removed and hunting will be good. There is no ritual here but luck is self-regulating once the knowledge has been obtained. If the dead person is of a *different* clan from the hunters even though he is resident in the same camp, hunting luck will *not* be adversely affected.

An interesting comparison with these beliefs can be made when one looks at the reverse of the death process – pregnancy. The Baka believe that a pregnant woman can be a cause of 'bad luck'. When hunting is bad, the hunters ask around to see if a woman is pregnant and she has not announced the fact to the camp. For, when the announcement has been made, hunting will be good once more. The announcement of a new pregnancy is made by the husband and wife in a joint ritual.

Mbuti Pygmy death beliefs and practices

In this section I draw my material directly from Colin Turnbull's impressive ethnography on the net-hunting Mbuti in his book *Wayward Servants* (Turnbull, 1965). His data on mortuary practices in this and other sources is considerably richer than my short account would suggest. I start by describing what happens when death occurs in forest camps and deal later with the rather more elaborate

procedures which are adopted when the Mbuti are living in or near a village of one of the neighbouring agricultural peoples.

For the Mbuti a death or an impending death involves the person's nuclear family and a few other people who have been particularly close to the dead or dying person during their lives. The whole band community is drawn into the procedures for bringing the activities of the community back to normal after the death (Turnbull, 1965:142, 262–3). Personal grief is freely expressed by close relatives, 'by young and old together and may at times become apparently uncontrollable. In the same way that the Mbuti are given to excessive bursts of laughter, often developing into near hysteria, so when they weep they do so with what amounts almost to violence.' A close relative arriving at the camp of a dying person 'will burst into tears and wailing loudly will enter the hut and throw himself on the ground at the bedside of the dying person'. Sometimes the relative may seek to express grief by wounding himself or herself though other people would intervene if there were any danger of serious injury.

> The rest of the adults in the band will sit around outside their huts, watching the wailers run in and out of the sick person's hut, and while they themselves are likely to be serious and upset they are also likely to make jokes at any excess of zeal on the part of any mourner. Young children continue playing as though nothing were going on; youths sit morosely by themselves, or wander off into the forest on foraging expeditions. (Turnbull, 1965:142–3)

As soon as the dying person dies there is a renewed burst of wailing and then the camp begins to quieten down. Burial takes place the same day, if enough daylight is left, or as early as possible the following day (p.143). In the forest members of the nuclear family of the person who has died are responsible for disposing of the body. They may be aided by others but help is not generally needed (pp.144, 262). They 'scratch a shallow hole in the floor of the hut and bury the deceased person there, pulling the hut down over the grave'. 'During burial . . . there is likely to be a final outburst of wailing from the relatives, particularly female, and some may try to throw themselves into the grave' (p.143). Both at this time and more generally, women are more active at wailing than men (Putnam, 1950:341; Turnbull, 1965:146).

As soon as the burial is over the camp is abandoned, 'nothing being left to indicate the grave site, nothing being buried with the body except maybe a few very personal belongings such as bark cloth, bracelet or necklace. All other property is divided before the camp is abandoned' (Turnbull, 1965:143). When a very small child dies, people do not always abandon the camp or even the hut in which the child lived (pp.143–4).

After the burial and the move to a new site, the band elders seek to

restore 'quiet' and to bring the situation back to normal as soon as possible. 'Only the genuine sobbing of the immediate family is permitted and this may be heard coming from their huts at any time of the day or night, never in public' (p.143). 'While personal grief is recognised and allowed, it is still resented and every effort is made to minimise it by those not so directly concerned' (p.144).

The death of an adult is likely to be followed by a major festival, the *molimo*, within a few days after arrival at the new camp (p.263). A child's death is not usually marked in this way (p.144). The *molimo* is not held after every adult death, not even after the death of every great hunter. It is particularly appropriate that it should be held if at the time of the death there is a combination of poor hunting, ill humour and general sickness. A death 'at a time of good hunting and general contentment may pass unmarked except by the usual summary burial and change of camp, all expression of grief being confined to the immediate family concerned' (p.261). The stated purpose of the *molimo* is to 'awaken' and 'rejoice' the forest which must have been sleeping when matters were going badly (p.262). It is not concerned at all with the fate of the individual who has died (p.145).

> The *molimo* . . . calls for vigorous hunting during the daytime, and equally vigorous singing and dancing at night. It involves the entire band except the children and through its very emphasis on life it reinforces band solidarity. Through the sheer pleasure found in *molimo* activities personal grief is lessened, and through the symbolic nature of some of the songs and dances the despair that death could otherwise awaken is averted. Death is acknowledged, in the *molimo* fire dance, as inevitable and as being unconnected with any unnatural force. (p.144)

'The sexual act is represented in the *molimo* dances . . . and there is very evidently expressed concern with the regeneration of life' (p.280). The *molimo* affirms 'a belief in life and in the continuity of life, and in the continuity of the band despite the fact of death' (p.145).

Death is treated by the Mbuti as entirely natural (p.146). Outsider diviners in the villages may name an Mbuti as responsible for causing another Mbuti's death by witchcraft but when this happens 'there was not the slightest thought that the "witch" actually had anything to do with the death' (p.75). There is no publicly expressed concern for or fear of the dead; on the contrary, the pressure is to forget them as soon as possible. People are reluctant to mention them by name, or even to talk about them, but there is no rigid prohibition (Turnbull, 1965:184, footnote). They avoid speculating about whether there is a life after death and 'their response to villagers, missionaries or any who claim a knowledge of [the] afterlife is to say, "How do you know? Have you died and been there?"' (p.247).

For much of the time the Mbuti are living in or near the villages of neighbouring agricultural peoples who have very different death beliefs and practices. If a death occurs there, the Mbuti leave the funeral arrangements in the hands of the villagers (p.143). The Mbuti attitude to villager death ritual, as to other villager rituals, is to accept the externals but none of the implications (p.74). In the village the entire band is mobilised to take part in the burial procession. The eldest son acts as chief mourner. Youths who are not necessarily connected with the deceased in any way other than by band membership dig the grave under villager supervision. They don't take this very seriously and may laugh and joke even when the body is being lowered into the grave (p.143). The villagers may insist on burying the body with cloths and sleeping mats but the Mbuti are particularly reluctant to allow anything of value to be buried with a body and they do their best to retrieve such valuables at the last moment without being seen (p.145).

> Similarly head-shaving seems to be of little significance to the Mbuti, though they frequently do shave when a member of the band dies. But, unlike the villagers, they are not consistent in the practice, and they leave their hair lying around where it has fallen to the ground, whereas the villagers are scrupulously careful to collect their own hair cuttings, which they take off into the forest or to a stream, and secretly hide (p.145).

Villagers expect the Mbuti to continue mourning over a period and in a village camp sporadic formal wailing breaks out about three times each day for about two or three days. The villagers like the wailing to be loud and enthusiastic but Mbuti elders object strongly, especially if the mourner is not a close relative, and seek to restore 'quiet' to the camp as soon as possible (p.143).

!Kung Bushman death beliefs and practices

In spite of having four excellent books on the !Kung, all published within the past five years (Lee & DeVore, 1976; Marshall, 1976; Howell, 1979; Lee, 1979), I have found data on only some of the aspects of the subject with which we are concerned here.

Unlike the other societies so far discussed the !Kung have clearly formulated beliefs about an afterlife and there is quite a lot of data on this which I will come to shortly. I have found very little information about the immediate procedures when death occurs. Marshall states : 'Burial . . . has no effect upon the status in the afterlife – whether a person is buried properly bound in a deep round grave or scratched into a shallow trench or not buried at all and eaten by beasts' (Marshall, 1962:243). In a brief list of rites in Marshall's book (1976:178–9) there is

no mention of death ritual, so the assumption must be that the procedures at death are relatively mundane and simple.

It is clear from Yellen (1976) that a camp site is abandoned after a death: 'A single dry-season camp may be occupied for as long as six months. It would be abandoned for a site nearby, generally less than 100 m away, *only if a death occurs in the camp* or if it becomes extremely rank or bug ridden' (Yellen, 1976:65, my emphasis). The evidence suggests that inheritance is unimportant:

> There is not much property to inherit. Land and the resources of food and water are owned by the band, not privately by individuals. A considerable amount of an individual's personal property is destroyed at the time of his death. This is not done to provide implements for the spirits in the afterlife. The !Kung believe that the spirits of the dead have their own heavenly objects and need nothing from earth. It is done because no member of the family wants to use the common objects of the dead, which too vividly remind them of their loss. Only the more rare and important possessions are kept, such as assegais and fine ornaments. These are inherited by the eldest son. Failing a son, the spouse or a daughter or sibling or, failing these, some other close relative who was present would take the things. Whoever took them would be expected to give some of them to other relatives. (Marshall, 1965:260)

Every !Kung is believed to have within him a special substance called *n!ow* which is produced in the person by his or her mother's uterine fluid when it flows on the ground at the time of the person's birth. So do certain large game animals. The infant's *n!ow* affects the weather (positively or negatively) at the time of his birth. At death the weather is said to be affected in the same way by the *n!ow* (Marshall, 1957:236).

Marshall (1976:379) writes, 'The !Kung fear death, but no more acutely or consciously, I suppose, than does most of mankind'. They don't express their fear openly. It can be seen, Marshall suggests, both in their preoccupation with hunger and starvation even when food is not lacking and in their preoccupation with the protection of their health (of which more will be said in a moment).

Apart from suicide, no distinction is made between a good death and a bad death (Marshall, 1962:243). Marshall doesn't specify how suicides are treated.

Causes of death

Death is caused by the great god, ≠Gao!na, life giver and death giver, who sends good or evil according to his will or to his whim, and not according to man's deserts. He sends death via the lesser god, //Gauwa, and more particularly by means of his messengers, the undifferentiated spirits of the dead, the //gauwasi. When

they are told to kill, they do so. 'When a person dies, //gauwasi come soon to take his spirit' (Marshall, 1962:242). Any of them may come – either ancestors of the dead person or non-related spirits. 'The !Kung fear them, pray to them to invoke their mercy or sympathy, exhort them in anger' (p.241). They also hurl sexual and other insults at them (Marshall, 1969:376). They have power to provide good or evil but people fear them and expect evil (p.350). They have some (but apparently not very much) independence of action (p.350). But 'they want nothing from men and there is no point in offering them things' (Marshall, 1962:243). 'The concept of having special relations with their own ancestors or of worshipping ancestors is lacking' (p.241).

The !Kung hold frequent medicine dances at night, the aim of which is to protect people from sickness and to ward off death brought by the //gauwasi (Marshall, 1969:439). Those who do the warding-off are trance dancers – the majority of the adult men. The trance dancers have the ability to see and to drive away the spirits of the dead (Lee, 1968). People must come to the dance. If the spirits of the dead see a person sitting alone at his own fire apart from the dancing group, they might kill him (Marshall, 1969:350). The medicine dance is held usually when the moon is full (p.356), after a successful hunt or when visitors arrive or are about to depart. Sometimes they hold it when there is sickness in camp though this is not a frequent reason.

> When the curings fail and death occurs, the !Kung do not blame the trance dancers directly. They believe that his *n/um* (medicine) is weak or that it has stopped working altogether, and, in the last analysis, that the great god is determined to take the person and will not allow him to be cured. To this they must be resigned. (Marshall, 1969:379)

So death here is not a product of the victim's own action or of the actions of other !Kung. It comes from outside the social body. Lee cites (1968:52) an exceptional, isolated case, however, in which the belief in the power of spirits of the dead was transmuted into the equivalent of a witchcraft accusation. Two old men had been quarrelling over a period of years. One became ill and accused the other saying, 'He has spoken ill of me. His ancestors have overheard these words and now they come to bother me. Why can't he control his ancestors?' The accused man then had to come to the victim's bedside and to ask his offending ancestors to go away. In a quite different context a !Kung who had on his own initiative become a settled farmer was suspected by other !Kung, to whom he was not as generous as they would have wished, of having 'learned techniques of witchcraft from black medicine men' (Lee, 1976:413).

Consequences of death

Much has already been said. Perhaps it should be mentioned that a !Kung avoids referring to dead people by name, regardless of whether or not he accorded them reserved behaviour in life. Avoiding their names shows respect for the dead but it also saves the speaker from danger. The dead man's spirit might overhear his name being uttered and show displeasure by sending sickness (Marshall, 1976:245).

There is no indication that I have found of any stress on mourning or any specification of a period during which a widow or widower may not remarry.

The implications of the data

Perhaps I should first make a very general comment about the nature of the data. Human death is relatively invisible in these societies in comparison with societies whose members live in much larger communities and at much higher population densities. This means that inevitably anthropologists will, at best, have only been able to observe a small number of instances and must rely heavily on informants' statements whose accuracy may be affected by the sensitivity of the topic. Caution in handling the data is necessary and I hope I have been sufficiently cautious.

My argument is that in these four instances, there are fundamental similarities in the form and in the meaning of the set of beliefs and actions connected with human death which require explanation. There are also differences and distinctions, in my view relatively minor, which require comment but which are largely beyond the scope of this paper. I shall say only a little here about these differences.

The similarities are these:

1) The actual procedures for treatment of and disposal of the body are relatively simple and mundane. They go beyond, but not very far beyond, the directly practical requirements for getting rid of a rotting corpse. The general rule that camp is rapidly abandoned after a death in all four instances is not to be seen as an indication of some strong formal belief in pollution (though there *are* pollution beliefs), or as arising from some moral obligation to the dead man or his spirit. Movement is, in all these societies, very easily accomplished and takes place quite casually for the most trivial of reasons: it is quite unlike the movement of people with substantial investment in dwellings. Movement to leave a corpse behind would be obviously practically desirable and could be expected to occur anyway for practical reasons in highly

nomadic hunting and gathering societies. In a society in which to move is almost as simple as to stay where you are, what would be surprising and, indicative of something more ideological, would be an explicit emphasis on staying put, on staying in one place.

Having said this, however, I do not wish to suggest that the 'practical' explanation is sufficient: in all of these societies there is an apparently explicit *rule* of moving camp after death. The Hadza say the site has become 'hot' and they talk about the pollution of death. The important point is that the rule does not make demands on people which go much beyond the practicalities of the situation.

Although I haven't found much evidence, there seems to be minimal emphasis on preparing the corpse – wrapping, annointing, binding, decorating, etc. Procedures for preparation and disposal of the corpse can be said to involve very little provision of time, labour or material goods by the mourners.

2) The various tasks and responsibilities connected with the burial or disposal of the corpse and with other procedures which follow death are apparently not in general allocated to specific kinsmen and affines. Allocation is informal except in the village context when Baka sons-in-law dig the grave and Mbuti eldest sons act as chief mourners. There is some division of labour by sex, with women expected to take a more active part in public lamentation and men expected to do most of the work of grave digging and grave filling.

3) There is no search for the cause of death. No divination or other standardised procedures are used for diagnosing why the person died. People repudiate the idea that death is caused by the supernatural actions of other members of their own society – that is by the witchcraft or sorcery of their fellow hunter-gatherers. It is seen as simply 'natural', or as a result of an unpredictable decision by God, or of the mysterious powers (poison, witchcraft, sorcery) of outsiders, or as a result of the victim's own greed or carelessness (e.g. in eating *epeme* meat). The cause is a matter for speculation not for action or decision. There is no attempt to reach an agreement on the cause.

4) There is no clearly defined distinction between a good and a bad death involving different procedures and different consequences for the dead man and for the mourners.

5) There may or may not be a belief in an afterlife.[7] If there is, the afterlife is unaffected by the individual's behaviour in this life, by the actions of the mourners at the time of the mortuary ritual or by subsequent offerings.

6) After the practicalities and immediate ceremony, if any, at death, ordinary life goes on. There may even be an immediate assertion of

normality as is expressed in the Mbuti *molimo* ceremony. There are minimal rules for mourners or other survivors. The site of death and the remains may be avoided but if they are not the danger does not seem to be very serious. The clothing and possessions of the dead person are buried with him or are quickly and rather casually distributed. There may be some restriction on uttering the name of the dead person, but there is no rule about it and no serious consequence flows from using the name (except perhaps in the !Kung case). There is no clear marking out of the widow or widower and no rule restricting the timing of remarriage or whom they may remarry (apart, that is, from the restrictions which apply equally to first marriages).

7) There are no chiefs, shamans or other specialists whose special task it is to administer or control death rituals.

8) Death procedures are only peripherally connected with ideas of fertility of human beings or of plants and animals or of the natural world more generally. Among the Hadza, objects (ritual children) which may be said to symbolise parenthood, and especially the reproductive capacity of mothers, are broken on the grave (see p.190 above). I have no Hadza explanation of why such objects are broken but there seems no reason to believe that the act does anything more than to state the obvious point that the dead person is finished both as child and as parent.

Among the Mbuti, after a death the natural and social world is regenerated through ritual including explicit sexual imagery. However this ritual is not obligatory and is held only when other matters are going badly – when hunting is unsuccessful, when people are ill-humoured and sick (see p.198 above). Among the Baka a pregnancy and a death (and among the Hadza only a death) briefly affect hunting success until they are publicly acknowledged (see p.193 and p.196 above): once acknowledged, disorder is converted into order and hunting is again effective. Among the !Kung an individual's birth and death, his beginning and his end, have a strictly transient effect on the weather (see p.200 above). All these are themes that might provide a starting-point for elaboration into a set of systematic beliefs about fertility and regeneration in death but the evidence does not, I think, support the idea that such a set of systematic beliefs has already developed in any of these four societies.

Conclusions

The material can be summed up by saying that beliefs and practices associated with death are in all four of these societies relatively simple

and straightforward and would apparently be even simpler were it not for the desire to avoid humiliation by their pastoral and agricultural neighbours who find it difficult to accept the apparently casual practices of the hunter-gatherers. In sub-Saharan Africa, in general, beliefs and practices associated with death are rather variable but the set of similarities that I have outlined above do stand out as very unusual even in comparison with the Nuer, long famed for the simplicity of their death procedures (Evans-Pritchard, 1956:144–76). Other Africans do not (or did not) *all* practise ancestor worship though probably most do (or did); not all believe (or believed) that death is usually a consequence of witchcraft/sorcery by a member of their own tribe though almost certainly most do (or did); not all use elaborate burial ceremonies – some, like the Masai, apparently leave bodies out for the hyaenas – though probably most do bury and do use elaborate procedures either at burial or during later mortuary ceremonies. What I would be very surprised to find in any pastoral or agricultural African group is the particular combination of factors which I have described above.

Are these factors, then, a direct product of nomadic hunting and gathering? Clearly they are not, because in other parts of the world nomadic or semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers often have relatively elaborate mortuary beliefs and practices (see for example E.H. Man, 1932:73–9 and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 1948:106–14, 285–329 on the Andamanese; A.P. Elkin, 1956:295–320, W. Lloyd Warner, 1958: 412–50, M.J. Meggitt, 1962:317–30 and T.G.H. Strehlow, 1964:739–40 on the Australian Aborigines; J. Teit, 1900:327–36, 357–60 on the Thompson Indians of British Columbia). There are also many nomadic hunters and gatherers in other parts of the world with death beliefs and practices as simple as those of these four African societies.

In general terms it can be said that hunters and gatherers with relatively simple death beliefs and practices are those with what I have defined elsewhere as immediate-return rather than delayed-return economies, social organisation and values (Woodburn, 1978; 1979; 1980; and in press). Without going into detail here, an immediate-return system is one in which activity oriented directly to the present (rather than to the past or the future) is stressed, in which people use their labour to obtain food and other resources which are consumed on the day they are obtained or casually over the days that follow, in which there is a minimum of investment in long-lasting artefacts or in long-enduring debts, obligations or other binding commitments to specific kinsmen, affines, contractual partners or to members of bounded corporate groups, however these are recruited. The empha-

sis is on joint participation in and sharing with an *ad hoc* local community, undifferentiated except by age and sex, and more generally on *ad hoc* pragmatism rather than on planning or continuity.

The only thorough-going immediate-return systems are those of certain hunting and gathering societies, but an immediate-return style is found in some specific, restricted contexts in other societies. The vast majority of human societies – including many hunting and gathering societies – have delayed-return systems.

I think the points that emerge are really rather straightforward. The death beliefs and practices of these four societies are ones which stress personal, temporary grief and the temporary shared grief of the wider food-sharing community undifferentiated except by age and sex. There is no emphasis at all on dependence between specific kin or affines, nor on their moral responsibilities to each other. Questions of succession and inheritance (and of successors and heirs) scarcely arise since there is no office of household head (if by household head we mean someone with a measure of real control over assets and personnel) nor any other office of much significance, nor any property of much value, to be transmitted from one generation to the next. When someone dies, he is not *replaced* socially by someone else in the sense that he or she is in delayed-return systems.[8]

Within delayed-return systems elaborate mortuary ritual and formal mourning are most stressed when an office-holder, particularly an important office-holder, dies and least stressed when a small child who holds no office and no property dies. For such a child, mortuary ritual and mourning may be set aside altogether and the corpse disposed of in an entirely practical, non-ritualised manner (see for example Evans-Pritchard, 1956:156). It seems obvious that, other things being equal, where death involves major social readjustments and the risk of conflict and disorder, death beliefs and practices will be more elaborate and more ritualised than where such adjustments involve no reallocation of authority or of assets but are largely a matter of personal feelings. What is obvious within societies also applies between societies. In those immediate-return societies in which individuals are to a large extent self-provisioning, in which they do not depend on intergenerational transmission (either *inter vivos* or on the death of the person of senior generation) for access to crucial property or status, there is unlikely to be much ideological development of the fact that persons of senior generation beget those of junior generation and are both displaced and replaced by them.

In these systems the dead are not dispossessed in the interests of the living who derive no significant benefit from any death. And just as the living are not believed to have the capacity or power to damage others by witchcraft or by cursing them in these systems in which individuals are so self-dependent and so free from vulnerability to the malice or incompetence of their associates, so too they are not fearful of the capacity of the dead, whom they have not dispossessed, to damage them.[9] They have few formal obligations or commitments to the living and few, too, to the dead and accordingly few opportunities to wrong the living or the dead.

The fact that any strong expression of the idea of replacement would be out of place here means that an obvious part of the basis for the association between death and fertility is lacking. People need no successors to hold their offices, or heirs to manage their property, and the propagation of the next generation is not a matter of the same anxious concern that it so obviously is when heirs and successors are necessary. At the same time part of the force of the analogy between birth and death – the fact that one comes into the world and goes out of it without commitments and without property – is seriously weakened if one also has few commitments and little property during life.

More generally the idea of social continuity is not one which is stressed in immediate-return systems which are in so many respects strongly oriented to present activity. Economic activity is focused on immediate production and immediate consumption, and social activity in general is not burdened by substantial long-term concern, commitment or planning. Consistent with this, the focus in death beliefs and practices is largely on immediate practicalities – the disposal of the corpse, the expression of personal grief and the grief of the wider community – rather than in provision for social replacement, reproduction and long-term continuity.

Of these four societies, the one in which mutuality – the sense of mutual attachment, the obligation to participate and to share on an egalitarian basis – is most emphasised is !Kung society. And among the !Kung there are some significant long-term obligations in the system of *hxaro* exchanges (Wiessner, 1977). Interestingly, among the !Kung alone, the spirits of the dead – not specific ancestors but the undifferentiated spirits of the dead – are believed to constitute a serious danger, bringing illness to people and having to be kept constantly at bay by the trance dancers of the medicine dance. I suppose it could be argued that, just as the dead are more likely to be considered to be dangerous when death robs them of their riches and of their positions of power, so here where the dead have more to lose than in other immediate-return systems, they are not seen as neutral, irrelevant or even non-existent, but as dangerous. But there is an

important difference: among the !Kung, just as among other immediate-return systems, the living have nothing to gain from a person's death. So the implied resentment of the dead has less to feed on.

More to the point, I do not think that the type of explanatory framework I have developed can explain differences of this sort adequately. I am not arguing for a tight one-to-one correlation between society and ideology, between the specific characteristics of immediate-return systems and the specific characteristics of death beliefs and practices. All I am suggesting is that an immediate-return system does not provide fertile ground for the ideological elaboration of death beliefs and practices in general, nor for a link between death and fertility in particular.

NOTES

1 I would like to thank Alan Barnard and Robert Dodd who provided me with helpfully detailed and thought-provoking comment on this paper which I would have liked to have used more effectively. I am additionally indebted to Robert Dodd for preparing ethnographic notes on the death beliefs and practices of the Baka Pygmies which have been of great value in compiling this paper.

2 This may appear surprising but really it is not: the crude death rate from the one African hunting and gathering society on which we have good demographic data, the !Kung Bushmen, is sixteen per thousand years lived (Howell, 1976:141). Probably the figure is not very different for the Hadza. If all deaths occurred in camp, then in a camp of average size one would expect on average one death about every two years.

3 Both mountains are well outside the area in which the Hadza live but both are visible on a clear day from many parts of the area.

4 I was given one account of how women may tread the grave using the dance step usually reserved for men and used only at the sacred monthly *epeme* dance (see below) and of how they may sing certain sacred *epeme* songs, one of which is as follows: 'He (using an honorific term applied to a dead man) has gone to sleep in the dust; he has got his back dirty through lying in the dust'. During my most recent visit to the Hadza in 1981, men whom I consulted denied that women could ever tread the grave using the *epeme* step or that they would sing *epeme* songs in this context.

5 I here describe the 'traditional' situation as it existed during the main period of my field research in the late 1950s. In the government settlement schemes of today, witchcraft fears are rampant and people fear both non-Hadza and now, increasingly, other Hadza, who are said to have learnt witchcraft from non-Hadza and to be using it against their fellow Hadza. This change in belief has happened during a period in which there has been a great deal of genuine ill-health and many deaths in the settlements and in which it has become more difficult for Hadza to move away from those with whom they are in conflict without sacrificing vital interests. Moreover in settlement conditions non-Hadza diviners ready to explain misfortune in terms of witchcraft are far more accessible and influential than they were in the past.

6 Unlike the situation among the Baka (see p.196), an unrevealed Hadza pregnancy has no effect on Hadza hunting additional to or separate from the effect of pregnancy in general on hunting (see p.188).

7 Apparently there are very few societies in the world in which people don't believe in an afterlife. At any rate Frazer in his vast compendium *The belief in immortality and the worship of the dead* states: 'The question whether our conscious personality survives after death has been answered by almost all races of men in the affirmative. On this point sceptical or agnostic peoples are nearly, if not wholly, unknown.' (Frazer, 1968:133).

8 A dead wife or a dead husband may later be replaced by a new spouse. But in these societies marriage involves fewer property commitments and other obligations to the spouse or to affines than in most delayed-return systems. The emphasis is on the personal relationship between spouses rather than on alliance between two bodies of kinsmen. In this situation, social constraints on remarriage after the death of a spouse (or after divorce) are minimal. The widower or widow is not polluted and is not restrained, except by personal feelings, from remarrying whenever he or she chooses.

9 What I say here may not apply to the !Kung. I discuss this issue at the end of this paper.

REFERENCES

Elkin, A.P. 1956. *The Australian Aborigines: how to understand them*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1956. *Nuer religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Frazer, J.G. 1968. (First published, 1913–24) *The belief in immortality and the worship of the dead*. 3 Volumes. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall.

Howell, N. 1976. 'The population of the Dobe area !Kung', in *Kalahari hunter–gatherers: studies of the !Kung San and their neighbors*. ed. R.B. Lee & I. DeVore. Harvard University Press.

1979. *Demography of the Dobe !Kung*. New York: Academic Press.

Lee, R.B. 1968. 'The sociology of !Kung Bushman trance performances', in *Trance and possession states*. ed. R. Prince. Montreal: Bucke Memorial Society.

1976. '!Kung spacial organization: an ecological and historical perspective', in *Kalahari hunter–gatherers: studies of the !Kung San and their neighbors*. ed. R.B. Lee & I. DeVore. Harvard University Press.

1979. *The !Kung San: men, women and work in a foraging society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lee, R.B. & DeVore, I. (eds) 1976. *Kalahari hunter–gatherers: studies of the !Kung San and their neighbors*. Harvard University Press.

Man, E.H. 1932. (First published, 1885) *On the aboriginal inhabitants of the Andaman Islands*. London: Royal Anthropological Institute.

Marshall, L. 1957. 'N!ow', *Africa*, **27**(3), 232–40.

1962. '!Kung Bushman religious beliefs', *Africa*, **32**(3), 221–52.

1965. 'The !Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert', in *Peoples of Africa*. ed. J.L. Gibbs, Jr. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
1969. 'The medicine dance of the !Kung Bushmen'. *Africa*, **39**, 347–81.
1976. *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae*. Harvard University Press.
Meggitt, M.J. 1962. *Desert people: a study of the Walbiri Aborigines of Central Australia*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
Putnam, P. 1950. 'The Pygmies of the Ituri Forest', in *A reader in general anthropology*. ed. C.S. Coon. London: Jonathan Cape.
Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1948. *The Andaman Islanders*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.
Strehlow, T.G.H. 1964. 'Personal monototemism in a polytotemic community', in *Festschrift für Ad.E. Jensen*. ed. E. Haberland, M. Schuster & H. Straube. Munich: Renner.
Teit, J.A. 1900. 'The Thompson Indians'. *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History*, **2**.
Turnbull, C.M. 1965. *Wayward servants: the two worlds of the African Pygmies*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
Warner, W. Lloyd 1958. *A black civilization: a study of an Australian tribe*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
Wiessner, P.W. 1977. 'Hxaro: a regional system of reciprocity for reducing risk among the !Kung San'. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan.
Woodburn, J.C. 1974. 'The interpretation of Hadza and other menstrual taboos'. Unpublished paper.
1978. 'Sex roles and the division of labour in hunting and gathering societies'. Unpublished paper delivered at the 1st International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, Paris, June 1978.
1979. 'Minimal politics: the political organisation of the Hadza of North Tanzania', in *Politics in leadership: a comparative perspective*. eds W.A. Shack & P.S. Cohen. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
1980. 'Hunters and gatherers today and reconstruction of the past', in *Soviet and western anthropology*. ed. E. Gellner. London: Duckworth.
(in press) 'Egalitarian societies'. Malinowski memorial lecture, May 5th 1981.
Yellen, J.E. 1976. 'Settlement patterns of the !Kung: an archaeological perspective', in *Kalahari hunter–gatherers: studies of the !Kung San and their neighbors*. eds R.B. Lee & I. DeVore. Harvard University Press.

8 Death, women and power

MAURICE BLOCH

This chapter attempts to generalise about the different practices relating to death in different cultures and different societies, and in particular to suggest explanations for differences in funerary practices such as whether there are important or unimportant rituals, whether corpses are thought of as polluting or not and whether bodies are destroyed or preserved. Striking cross-cultural recurrences such as the association of mourning and women will also be examined. This, however, is done here in terms of questions raised by a re-examination of data on the Merina of Madagascar presented elsewhere (Bloch, 1971).

The Merina are a people who live in central Madagascar and who number over a million. They were traditionally divided into localised kin-groups which we may call demes. These were groups of people who traditionally lived in clearly-defined geographical areas focused on a few river valleys which had been turned into irrigated rice fields. For the Merina the association between the people of the deme and the land of the deme is, and should be, eternal. Indeed, the notion of ancestral land, that is land belonging to the deme, is totally merged with the notion of ancestors. The ancestors had lived and were buried in the ancestral land; the land, in the form of terraces, had been made by the ancestors. This merging is so complete that it is quite usual for Merina to say who their ancestors were by giving the name of a village. People are thought of as descendants of the land as much as they are thought of as descendants of their ancestors. The deme members are often referred to in the euphuistic metaphors of formal oratory as 'hairs growing out of the head' which is the ancestral land. Furthermore, the ancestors and the ancestral land are also merged with the living. This is because the living members of the deme should in their ideal moral representation be nothing else but continuators of the ancestors, the present incarnation of the continuing entity that is the deme (Bloch, 1974).

This of course is an idea which is only developed in highly formal