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**FUNERAL RITES AMONG ASHANTI IMMIGRANTS
IN TORONTO: A CASE STUDY**

By

**Paul Adjin-Tettey
B.A., Hons., University of Ghana, 1986**

THESIS

**Submitted to the Department of Religion and Culture
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts degree
Wilfrid Laurier University
1991**

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ABSTRACT

The Ashantis are well known for their strict observance and co-operation during funeral rites. I attempt to answer the following questions: To what extent do the Ashantis who have migrated to Canada still hold on to indigenous concepts and funeral practices? By virtue of their being in two worlds what difficulties come their way if they try to follow indigenous practice to its letter? What innovations have they introduced into their funeral rites? Can a symbol or procedure be radically altered and yet perceived as the same? In a foreign context does ritual retain its unifying function?

The method for this study combines library research with participation in, and observation of, Ashanti funeral rites in Toronto. It is essentially an ethnographic description of the funeral rites of Toronto Ashantis set in the context of comparative data from traditional and contemporary Ghana, as well as contemporary, non-Ashanti, Canadian funeral practices.

My conclusion is that funeral rites among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto represent a mix of Ashanti and Western cultures. The Ashanti immigrant community in Toronto has undergone tremendous acculturation due to emigration, but they still adhere to modifications of old values. The innovations introduced have not displaced the fundamental belief in ancestors. Ashanti funeral rites in Toronto exhibit a unifying function. The pleasure of the reunion of family and friends eclipses the grief that is felt.

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I am especially grateful to Ron Grimes, Andy Lyons and Mathias Guenther for their most thoughtful comments, guidance and inspiration.

To the Ashantis in Toronto, who welcomed me to their funeral rites and spent valuable time answering my questions, I say a very big thank you. People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors. As Edmund Burke said in 1790, "To be attracted to the sub-division, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle, the germ as it were, of public affections." I agree with Peter Sarpong (1974:viii) that "to despise your culture is to be ungrateful to your society--to betray it." To the Ashantis in Toronto I say, continue guarding the national soul of your race and never be tempted to despise your past. I am convinced that therein lies the sure hope that your children will continue making their own original contributions to knowledge and progress. Thoughtful Canadians can never wish that a distinct group such as you should try to become wholly Canadianized.

I wish to thank my father, Reuben Adjinn-Tettey, without whose support and love this work would not have been possible.

I dedicate this work to my loving wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Adjinn-Tettey, and to the memory of my dear late mother, Mrs. Gladys Adjinn-Tettey.

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A Note on Orthography

Anyone who embarks on studies concerning Ashanti becomes quickly aware of numerous variant spellings. The spelling of names of places in Ashanti is a case in point: the name of the same town is often spelled differently, for example, Asumagya and Essumeja, Tekiman and Techiman. With "Ashanti" itself scholars presently use two alternative spellings, "Asante" and "Ashanti." At the beginning of Ashanti studies "Asante" was in almost universal use among the Ashantis themselves and in the international community. "Asante" is used by some Ashantis as a family name. On the grounds that the overwhelming majority of Ashanti scholars now prefer the form "Ashanti," I will throughout this study use "Ashanti."

Often the term "Ashanti," with or without the article "the" is used to refer to the place as well as the people. It is also customary to use the plural "Ashantis" in referring to the people.

Preface

I have attended several funeral rites among the Ashantis in Ghana, and I have had first-hand experience of Ashanti culture by spending several years of my youth in Kumasi, the capital town of the Ashantis. I have also had the chance to talk with several highly educated Ashantis who are well versed in their own culture, and I have read the works of acknowledged authorities on Ashanti tradition, most of which I cite in the bibliography. From my own observations I find the accounts of some of these acknowledged authorities on Ashanti tradition to be generally correct and accurate; hence I rely on them as the basis for the first part of this study. I shall, however, point out my disagreements when necessary.

One Ashanti informant said a weekend never passes without an Ashanti funeral rite in Toronto. I do not know the exact population of Ashantis in Toronto but, judging from their attendance at funerals, I would say they number in the thousands. I attended six Ashanti funerals in Toronto between July, 1989, and December, 1990, and within the same period I interviewed about thirty Ashantis in Toronto. The second part of the study is based on my interviews with Ashantis, and the Ashanti funeral rites I participated in and observed at Toronto. I think it is preferable to have a case study based on a few clear and penetrating examples subjected to thorough examination than to multiply examples that are presented in a more superficial

fashion. For this reason I think the size of my sample is justifiable.

INTRODUCTION

Ashantis have a saying that "nothing can be more universal than death." Sometimes Ashantis express the universality of death by posing the question, "Whom will death spare?" Death is an event that is shared by people throughout history, throughout the world. Indeed, death is one event that occurs in every society, and every society has a way of explaining death, each society believing that its way is the right way. Yet, perhaps the truth remains that death is one event that scientists know no more about than the traditional priest in Kumasi. A person may know more about how dying occurs, at least the biological aspects, but none knows what death is.

Among any people theoretical reflections on death seem difficult to comprehend since those who have direct experience of death do not come back to narrate it. The Ashantis express this difficulty when they say: "No one climbs the ladder of death and returns." Yet, based on "supernatural encounters," conjectures, and a host of other factors, each society has developed roles, beliefs, values, ceremonies, and rituals to integrate death and the process of dying into the culture as a whole and to help cope with the mysteries and fears of death. As Victor Turner (1969:4) points out, while aspects of these beliefs are characterized by seemingly unresolvable paradoxes and ambiguities, they make sense within their cultural context.

One familiar way to deal with the fears and wonders about

death is to believe that death is not an end, but a rite of passage to another existence. Sometimes this existence does not differ very much from the present existence, except that it is usually more pleasant.

A great deal has been written about death and dying in cultures around the world and throughout history. Much of what is known about earlier cultures is connected with the fact of death. Through burial sites and tombs, a great deal of the world's past has been uncovered. Since death occurs in all cultures certain comparisons can be made across cultures with respect to the ways in which they handle funerals, burials, sickness, family relationships and religious beliefs. Rituals in connection with death are a good base to begin exploration of differences in societal values around the world. As Monica Wilson (1954:241) noted, rituals reveal a people's values at their deepest level. People express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I agree with Monica Wilson that it is in the study of rituals that one finds the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies.

Not surprisingly, Huntington and Metcalf (1979:2) claim the study of death rituals is a positive endeavor. They noted that in all societies, regardless of whether customs call for festive or restrained behavior, the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences. Life becomes transparent against

the background of death and fundamental social and cultural issues are revealed. Peoples' customary responses to death provide an important opportunity for sensitive probing into the nature of human life.

Arnold van Gennep (1960) noted that of all the rites of passage funerals are most strongly associated with symbols that express the core of life values sacred to the society at hand. Jack Goody (1962:13) approvingly quotes Malinowski:

Of all sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life--death--is of the greatest importance. Death is the gateway to the other world in more than the literal sense (Malinowski 1954).

It is not surprising that many of the early contributors to theories of religion, especially Edward Tylor and Herbert Spencer, saw in institutions that center upon death--funeral ceremonies, cults of the dead, and beliefs in an afterlife--the kernel of their studies. Indeed, several scholars besides Tylor and Spencer attempted to trace the origin of religion itself from institutions centering around death. These theories of the genesis of religion have been discussed at great length and various criticisms have been levelled against them.¹

The literature on rites of passage generally, and on death rites particularly, is enormous. So much is now known about the customs and institutions surrounding death and funerals in most human societies that it may seem doubtful if anything new can be added to the topic. In my opinion, there still remains much work

¹ For such theories refer to Evans-Pritchard (1965).

to be done in the area of funeral rites. Not much has been done with regard to work dealing with a people's funeral rites "exported" and practiced within a culture that is fundamentally different from the original context of practice.

On all the occasions that I have attended Ashanti funeral rites in Toronto I was overwhelmed by the extent to which the Ashanti immigrants still hold on to indigenous Ashanti practice with respect to funeral rites. At the same time I also noticed some innovations. The Ashantis are well known for their strict observance and co-operation during funeral rites. It is an obligation for every Ashanti to be present at the funeral rites of a deceased member of the family (i.e., extended family). Those who refuse to attend the funeral rites of a family member, even though they devote all their entire financial resources to support the rites, stand the chance of incurring the displeasure of the whole family even to the extent of being disowned by them. The evidence is that most Ashantis who die in Canada have their corpses sent to Ghana for burial. Relatives who died in Ghana also have rites performed here in Canada for them. Such practices make Ashanti funeral rites complex. In a situation where the Ashantis in Canada consider themselves as part of the Ashantis in Ghana, some problems or questions arise: to what extent do the Ashantis in Canada still hold on to indigenous concepts and practices of Ashanti funeral rites? What difficulties come their way if they try to follow indigenous practice to its letter? If some are unable to attend the funeral rites of close relatives

(mothers, for example), what consequences do they envisage and how do they overcome it? By virtue of their being in Canada what values have they acquired that stand in conflict with the practice of indigenous funeral rites? What changes do they want to see effected with regard to Ashanti funeral rites? What future do they see for indigenous Ashanti funeral rites? These and many such questions prompted me to undertake the study.

I will start by having a brief look at the African background, in particular, Ashanti social organization and religious beliefs and practices. It is essential in any study of the Ashantis to look at their background, because, if one ignores it and confines attention only to the present, there is a high probability of imposing serious distortions on their perspective. To study Ashanti funeral rites it is helpful to first look at what it is in the society which makes them behave and respond to situations in the way they do. Thus their background, especially their cosmology, is called into play. This fact becomes more pertinent if one remembers that religion is the basis of all their social institutions.

The next chapter treats the concept of death and funeral rites among the Ashantis as practiced in Ghana (West Africa) and Canadian concepts of death and funeral practices. In the light of Ashanti funeral practices in Ghana and Canadian funeral practices chapter three then considers funeral rites among the Ashantis in Toronto, after taking a quick look at the Ashanti immigrant experience and the immigrant community in Toronto.

CHAPTER ONE

AFRICAN BACKGROUND

Aspects of Ashanti Kinship

The numerous works on Ashanti, in particular, the writings of Rattray (1923,1927,1929), Danquah (1922,1928), Field (1948,1960), Fortes (1948,1949,1950,etc.), Busia (1951,1954), Sarpong (1974), and many other modern scholars (together with the numerous books written on the British campaigns in Ashanti) have so exhaustively described the Ashanti that it is unnecessary to give the usual detailed introductory remarks about their geography and general historical background. I intend to summarize only that background which is necessary for understanding their funeral rites in this section.

The Ashantis constitute one of the hundreds of different tribes found in Africa. There are over eight hundred languages in Africa of which Akan is one, and, as pointed out by Meyer Fortes (1950:252) and Christine Oppong (1974:28), the Ashantis are the most numerous of the Akan-speaking peoples.² The Akan of Ghana constitute about two-fifths of the total population of the

² Among the Akan-speaking people there are differences in dialect. The dialect groups include, in order of size, Ashanti, Fante-Agona, Brong, Akyem, Akwapim, Kwawu, Wasa, Nsema, Ahanta, and Sefwi.

country.³ They inhabit the southern half of Ghana, from the coast in the south to Gonja in the north, and from the Volta in the east to the Ivory Coast border in the west. Culturally, the people comprising the Akan are homogeneous to a high degree (28).

It is an axiom in anthropology that without a clear knowledge of the kinship system of a people it is impossible fully to understand their social organization. Ashanti social organization is based on matrilineal descent and, as Busia (1954:196) notes, one needs to know the Ashanti conception of the nature of human beings and society in order to understand fully their world view.

To the Ashanti a human being is both a biological and a spiritual entity, and this is seen in their theory of procreation, which indicates that a human being is compounded of two principles: the "blood" (mogya) of the mother and the "spirit" (ntoro) of the father. This belief, as Busia (196) states, reflects Ashanti social organization.

An individual derives certain rights and duties through the mother and others through the father. A child is bound by religious and educational ties to the father, but the greater part of one's rights and duties are derived through the mother. Two sets of bonds, a mother-child bond and a father-child bond, therefore, derive from the conception of the human being and determine two sets of groupings and relationships.

³ The present population of Ghana according to the United Nations estimate is 14 million (United Nations Population Report 1988).

The mother-child bond, which makes one a member of the mother's lineage,⁴ also makes one a member of a wider group, her clan. Every Ashanti lineage belongs to one of the seven clans.⁵ It is believed that all the lineages of a clan are matrilineally descended from a single, remote ancestress. However, as Busia (1954:197) notes, clan members of different lineages cannot show their genealogical connexion or even give the name of the ancestress from whom they claim a common ancestry. The concept is therefore mythical. However, it is an important unifying myth, because members of the same clan behave towards each other as though they were distant kin. The mother-child bond is the basis of a wide network of relationships. Wherever one travels, therefore, one finds someone with whom one has lineage or clanship ties.

Busia (197) describes the father-child bond as a spiritual one and says that just as every Ashanti belongs to a clan, so every Ashanti belongs to an Ntoro group.⁶ Scholars who have carried out extensive research into the dual family system of the Akan normally give twelve principal Ntoro groups. These are: Bosompra, Bosomtwi, Bosommuru, Bosompo, Bosom-Dwerebe, Bosom-

⁴ Busia (1954:196) mentions that the lineage may be so large a group that the members seldom meet except at the funeral of a member of the lineage.

⁵ Some scholars give the number of Ashanti clans as eight. See, for example, Rattray (1927:64). Some of the best authorities on Ashanti custom maintain that there are seven clans in Ashanti and group them as follows: Oyoko, Bretuo, Asona, Asenie, Aduana, Ekuona, and Asakyiri.

⁶ I will explain the Ntoro later.

Akom, Bosomafi, Bosomayesu, Bosom-Konsi, Bosomsika, Bosomafam, and Bosomkrete. The constant prefix "bosom" emphasizes the fact that each Ntoro is believed to be under the aegis of a god (bosom). Members of the same Ntoro group are linked by the observance of common taboos, use of common surnames, and common forms of etiquette. All these serve to strengthen the spiritual bond between a father and his children.

In sum Ashantis believe that the link between one generation and another is provided by the "blood," which is transmitted through the mother. As Fortes (1970a:138) notes, the Ashantis are well known for their matrilineal kinship. The tracing of matrilineal descent is important in almost every aspect of their social life, establishing personal status (as royal, commoner, or slave), validating the right to succeed to political office, claiming citizenship of a particular state, the utilization of lineage farmland and houses, and the inheritance of property. In short the most inclusive matrilineal descent group found in a community has important political, religious, legal, and economic functions. Its members have a single legal personality vis-a-vis outsiders in the sense that they are corporately responsible for each other's debts and wrongs, and borrowing between members is not considered to create a debt (Oppong 1974:28). The often-quoted saying which expresses the corporate unity of the lineage is "One lineage, one blood. A lineage is one person." This strong sense of unity in part explains why all family members are obliged to meet at the

funeral of a member of the lineage (Busia 1954:196).

An understanding of Ashanti social organization will help one comprehend many aspects of Ashanti funeral rites.

Aspects of Ashanti Religious Beliefs

The Ashantis are very religious. Rattray (1927:v) states that students who make a careful and sympathetic study of their social institutions sooner or later will find themselves almost unconsciously writing what is virtually a book or treatise on religion. In the same vein Max Assigmeng (1981), writing about Ghanaians states: "The central notion of the Ghanaian metaphysics, which they share with most other African peoples, is that of an inseparable identification between the spiritual and the material world." (1981:33). Religion tends to permeate every aspect of Ashanti life, but they are not completely blind when it comes to distinguishing between the sacred and their everyday activities. Generally, it is impossible to dissociate religion from the examination of almost any aspect of Ashanti social institutions. Religion is the strongest element in their traditional background, and it exerts the greatest influence on their thinking and living. Busia (1968:ix) in his study of their political system sees their political organization as necessarily connected with religion.

According to Peter Sarpong (1974:10), it would require only a very casual observation of the Ashantis to discover their deep and continual awareness of the presence of God among them. He

says the contention of those who raise doubts about the originality of the Ashanti conception of God is completely inadmissible. If the Ashanti concept of God had been borrowed from missionaries, it would hardly have been possible for it to have been so well impressed on their minds and incorporated into their language, art, poetry, proverbs, day-to-day behavior, and drumming, which were well known before the coming of the missionaries.

The Ashantis believe that the universe is full of spirits. Besides the Supreme Being, Nyame, who created all things and manifests his power through a pantheon of gods, there are numerous lesser spirits that animate trees, animals, or charms. Then there are the ever-present spirits of the ancestors, nsamanfo, whose constant contact with the life of people on the earth brings the world of the spirits close to the land of the living. Busia (1951:23) describes the religion of the Ashantis as mainly ancestor-worship.⁷ Ashanti funeral rites are best understood within the organized ceremonies in which the people express their sense of dependence on their ancestors. They believe in a world of spirits where all their ancestors live in much the same way as they lived on earth. As Busia (23) states, this conception of a life after death similar to life on earth is implicit in Ashanti funeral ceremonies.

Ashanti religion is very open to outside influences (Busia

⁷ I do not think ancestors are "worshipped" by Ashantis. Therefore, I will use the term "ancestor veneration."

1954:191). Formerly as a result of conquest the Ashantis took over the beliefs, gods and rites of the tribes they fought as well as those of neighboring tribes. From the Moslems in the north the Ashantis bought charms and amulets, which were highly prized for the protection they were believed to give in battle. None of these borrowed elements displaced the fundamental beliefs of the Ashantis. To them new gods and new religious elements were merely additions believed to give more power and protection against the spirits and forces of the world.

The Ashanti Concept of Human Nature

Since the Ashanti concept of a human nature is necessarily connected with the understanding of their concept of death, it is fitting to briefly have a look at it.

To the Ashanti a human being is not merely a physical or material entity. They believe that humans are composed of spiritual and material elements (Sarpong 1974:37; Amponsah 1977:43; Busia 1954:197). The following discussion of Ashanti notions of "soul" and "spirit" is particularly relevant to the discussion of funerary practices. Hertz (1960), in his famous discussion of Dayak secondary burial, established an important comparative principle, namely that cross-cultural variation in funeral practices is related to variation in collective representations concerning the nature of the soul (or souls) and the process of death.

Ashantis believe that people consist of certain components:

the mogya, the ntoro, the sunsum, and the okra.⁸ It is believed that everybody derives something from the mother, something from the father, and something from God, the creator. These elements so differently acquired combine to make one a particular human being.

The mogya, loosely translated as "blood," is derived from the mother. Fathers do not transmit "blood" to their children.⁹ It is the mogya that makes one a member of the mother's clan or abusuaban. All the members of the abusua consider themselves as belonging to the same blood group, mogya koro. Ashanti society is divided into clans on the basis of the mogya. At death one's corpse belongs to the mother's lineage on the basis of the mogya.¹⁰

The ntoro component is believed to be derived from one's father. Mothers do not transmit ntoro. Busia (1954:197) states that just as every Ashanti belongs to a clan, so also does every

⁸ Scholars of the Ashanti have given slightly different interpretations to these elements. Busia and Sarpong for instance seem to make no distinction between the sunsum and the ntoro. Other inconsistencies in interpretation may occur to the careful reader of books on Ashanti culture.

⁹ Ashantis, however, have a saying that a father's "blood" is "heavy" when a child strongly resembles the father. This does not mean in such instances the father transmits his blood.

¹⁰ In November, 1987, I attended the funeral rites of a very close Ashanti friend whose father wanted him to be buried at a place other than that which the members of the son's lineage had in mind. In spite of the fact that my late friend was closer to his father than to the members of his mother's lineage during his lifetime, his father could not have his way. In the end the father could not even witness the burial of his son. This is an example of why the Ashanti conception of human nature is important to the understanding of aspects of their funeral rites.

Ashanti belong to a ntoro group, which consist of people who share the same spirit. Busia translates ntoro as "spirit" inherited from the father and says it is synonymous with the sunsum. Other scholars, however, do not see sunsum this way. It is very difficult to make a conclusive statement on this issue, since several Ashantis I have contacted contradict themselves.

Amponsah (1977:43) describes the sunsum as an intangible element in human nature that accounts for one's character and disposition. Sarpong (1974:37) says the sunsum from the father molds an individual, making one clever, kind, stupid, eloquent, lazy, hardworking, etc. Ashantis believe that if one becomes sick in the absence of the father, one's health will be restored as soon as the father returns; this is because the father's sunsum covers the child. The sunsum is believed to be the spiritual cause of illness.

A strong sunsum is the most potent antidote against witchcraft. The sunsum of a witch leaves the body to perform misdeeds¹¹ (Amponsah 1977:43). Busia (1954:197) says the sunsum is not divine, but perishes with man after death. Sarpong (1974:37) states that at death, the sunsum turns into a ghost or an ancestor and sets out for the world of ancestors.

The final component of human nature, according to the Ashantis, is the okra, which Sarpong (37) translates as "soul." This component is believed to be part of the Supreme Being in

¹¹ Witches are believed to be able to transform their sunsum into various things, in particular, animals.

everybody. Sarpong says it makes every human being a living being, and Amponsah (1977:43) claims that its departure means death. The okra is the bearer of one's destiny,¹² and it serves as a guardian spirit. Busia (1954:197) describes the okra as "a life force, the small bit of the Creator that lives in every person's body. It returns to the Creator when the person dies. It is the Supreme Being that directly gives to a person this spirit or life when the person is about to be born, and with it one's destiny." As a guardian protector the okra receives certain sacrifices. If one commits a serious offence and is to face capital punishment, the person's okra has to be sacrificed to first. It is also purified from all defilement. The okra is immortal; it leaves the body at death and goes to the Supreme Being.

¹² Ashantis have a strong believe in predestination. This view is illustrated by many proverbs. There is, for example, an Ashanti proverb which states: "What God has ordained no human being can alter." It is believed that the last act of creation is the handing of the okra to the child. The okra then settles in the child as a life-long spiritual guide and life-giver. Before the okra leaves God to enter into the person, God tells the person what to do.

Scholars do not agree on the precise nature of the Ashanti concept of destiny, but, it seems, they believe that what God has destined cannot be evaded; this does not mean that Ashantis do not believe in personal responsibility. One is still held responsible for one's actions, because God speaks to one through the medium of one's conscience. There are also certain factors which can alter one's destiny. These include taking the advice of the elders, since they know the family laws and customs and are nearer the ancestors than the young. Supernatural forces such as the witches, sorcery, and even a powerful curse by someone can alter one's destiny. A person's hasty actions are believed to be able to mar his or her own good destiny.

The Ashanti concept of destiny, like most mythological concepts, is very complex and leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

CHAPTER TWO

DEATH AND FUNERALS

Among the Ashantis in Ghana

Ashanti funerals are very elaborate, and, as Sarpong (1974:32) points out, they are much more important than other rites and ceremonies. He justifies this statement by saying that in the Ashanti view life is hard, and one who has been able to rough it should be given a fitting departure and welcome into the next world.

To the Ashanti the celebration of a funeral is a very important social event carrying with it certain obligations for individuals. Its demand is often not the solemnity of a quiet atmosphere, but rather the turbulence of a festival shorn of its glaring gaiety. Huntington and Metcalf (1979:1) say funerals of many cultures are rowdy affairs. Indeed, in many parts of the world funerals are noisy affairs, and Ashanti funerals are no exception. Noises of drums and other musical instruments, the sounds of guns and of human voices singing, wailing, or speaking intermingle in the process of the funeral (Nketia 1955:36). Sounds can be heard far away from the scene of celebration. According to Needham (1967) there is a connection between percussion and transition, and he notes that the phenomenon is so universal that "its grounds must be sought in the general psychic character of mankind" (1967:394). Though drums and gongs may be

very widely employed at funerals, there is a particular intensity to the crashing, clanging, booming noise of Ashanti funeral rites.

Funeral rites among the Ashantis express their strong belief in the continued existence of the dead. Rattray (1927:104) mentions that an Ashanti funeral ceremony is, in part, a way of assisting the newly dead to pick up the threads linking him or her with the land of spirits.¹³ He says that to the Ashanti death is merely a transition from one kind of life to another (106).

Ashantis use euphemistic expressions, their voices dropping almost to a whisper, when reporting or announcing the death of a family member. Some of the most frequently used expressions are: "His/her head is no more." "He/she has dropped the spoon." "He/she has poured the salt away." "He/she has gone to where he/she came from." "He/she has gone to the back of the house or village." "A mighty tree has been uprooted."¹⁴ "He/she is absent elsewhere." "He/she has departed, or gone out." Oftentimes to announce the death of a very important person the expression used is, "The earth is cracked." All these circumlocutions by which Ashantis describe the death of a family member suggest something

¹³ Ashantis believe that all newly born come from a spirit world. They are not immediately considered to be members of the family until after eight days, when the child is "outdoored" and given a name. This practice explains why, when a baby dies at birth, there is no mourning. Paradoxically, Ashantis also believe that the family consists not only of the living, but the dead (i.e., ancestors) and those yet unborn. Chiefs are seen as custodians of the land for the living, the dead, and those yet unborn.

¹⁴ Said especially in connection with the death of an important person, for example, a chief.

other than mere denial of death. As Amponsah (1975:55) says, these euphemistic expressions indicate Ashantis' conceptions of death and life after death. No Ashanti would ever use the sentence, "The chief is dead" or describe in literal terms the death of a relative. Rattray (1927:108) claims that in the past anybody who mentioned the death of a chief or an elder without an euphemistic expression was killed.

Among the Ashanti death is personified as a skeleton or a skull with empty eye-sockets and ears. Its mercilessness is expressed in the Ashanti proverb, "If death comes to kill you and you supplicate it, calling it "father," it will kill you, and if you supplicate it calling it "mother," it will kill you" (Sarpong 1974:23).

Ashantis have several proverbs which illustrate the origin and purpose of death. Danquah (1944:77) cites some of the proverbs: "Odomankoma¹⁵ who created everything including death has taken so-and-so away." "Odomankoma created death but death killed him." "Odomankoma created death before he created prophecy." These proverbs indicate that Ashantis believe death was created by God. Sarpong (1974:24) emphasizes this point when he states that Ghanaians believe that in the last analysis, God, the final explanation of all phenomena, is the author of death. In support of this claim he quotes a well known Ashanti proverb: "If the Supreme Being has not killed you, but a human being kills you, you do not die."

¹⁵ Odomankoma is a name for God

There is a well known Ashanti myth that narrates the origin of death. In it the supreme being sent the dog and the chameleon to the world to deliver his messages. The dog was to deliver a message of life while the chameleon was to deliver a message of death. The message to be delivered first was supposed to determine the destiny of human beings; that is to say, should the message of life be delivered first, there would be no death. The dog and the chameleon both set out together. The dog tarried on the way. When it was half-way, it saw a bone and could not help picking it up. The dog became so fascinated by the bone that the chameleon was able to pass it to reach the people first. It announced the coming of death to the people. When the dog reached the people, the chameleon had already delivered its message. This story explains why it is a taboo to kill a chameleon in some Ashanti areas: the chameleon might inflict death on the victim.

Sarpong (1974:21) narrates a well known story among the Ashantis about the way human beings were to enjoy eternity through an Ashanti priest called Okomfo Anokye. This famous traditional priest locked himself in a room, supposedly in a duel with death. He was not to be seen for seven days and insisted that no one should weep for the entire period. Should his instruction be obeyed, he would emerge victorious on the seventh day thereby making the Ashantis immortal. But Okomfo Anokye died as a result of this duel with death. According to Ashanti oral tradition he could have won this duel easily on the seventh day, and this victory would have made the Ashantis immortal. However,

due to the foolishness of his niece, who imagined that Anokye had died in the locked up room, she wept bitterly on the sixth day, resulting in Anokye's death. Thus the Ashantis are not immortal.

Ashantis differentiate between natural and accidental deaths. A natural death is that of an aged person. An accidental death is that of a young person.¹⁶ The latter is regarded as premature death. This kind of death is attributed to supernatural forces such as witchcraft, magic, sorcery or a powerful curse. Sarpong (1974:25) notes that by far the most common sources of death are evil men, sorcerers and witches who are by nature always malevolent. Sorcerers are supposed to use physical objects like human hair, snails and roots of trees to achieve their ends, while a witch is supposed to act entirely psychically. Generally, sorcerers are said to cause death instantly, while witches cause it through protracted illnesses, although they too may be the cause of a sudden death. A witch is believed to feed on human flesh.

Some believe that ancestors¹⁷ can cause death. Others are of

¹⁶ Ashantis are at pains to find out the cause of every death. They believe the cause of death can be revealed by diviners and medicine people and sometimes by the spirit of the deceased through a medium who might be possessed by the spirit of the deceased.

¹⁷ Not all dead people among the Ashantis are considered ancestors. Young people are not ancestors. Before a person becomes an ancestor one must be an adult and should be a married person with children. Another criterion is for one to have led a good moral life and died a "good" or "natural" death. Those who die tragically or through "unclean" diseases such as leprosy, dropsy, epilepsy, sleeping sickness, etc., are not honored as ancestors. Such deaths are thought to be the result of hidden crime. Death through childbirth, suicide, or motor accident are

the opinion that punishment in the form of death, barrenness and impotence are brought about by deities rather than ancestors. But there are incidents in which dead relatives impose a disaster in the form of the deaths of close relatives for failure to observe funeral rites. Unfaithfulness on the part of a woman can also cause her death during childbirth.

People's own misbehavior may cause their death or the death of their compatriots, especially when a person has, for example, broken a taboo or acted immorally. Such deaths are said to be brought about by the spiritual agent or being thought to have been most angered by the misconduct. Ashantis believe that in such cases no one, including the best physician, can prevent death unless and until the proper spiritual course of action is taken in good time to avoid disaster. Mass deaths such as those occurring in epidemics, plagues or hurricanes are the best examples of deaths believed to be caused by God, the gods or the ancestors. Sarpong (1974:25) says ancestors are more likely to deal severely with one whose duty is to organize fitting funeral rites in honor of the dead but ignores them, or one who sells an ancestral property without due protocol.

Belief in the existence of ancestors occupies a very important place in Ashanti religious thought. The hereafter replicates this earthly existence. "The land of the departed is neither better nor worse than that of the living" (Dickson and

all considered unnatural. But a person who dies in war is honored as an ancestor.

Ellingworth 1970:166). Ashantis do not have a precise geographical location for the land of the dead. Some picture it to be far beneath the earth, while others think it is a far away place on earth, an uninhabited part of the wilderness, in rocks, caves or forests. In any case, the idea of survival after death occupies an important place in the Ashanti belief system, and one has to bear this in mind in order to appreciate Ashanti funeral rites.

For Ashantis death occurs when the okra leaves to return to its source, the supreme being. This departure brings about the final disintegration of the various elements comprising the human body. Dennis Warren (1973:19) notes that at death one's mogya becomes a saman, "ghost," and will enter samando, "the spirit world." The okra survives and returns to God. Warren says the ntoro does not enter the samando but remains behind to care for a man's children, who have the same ntoro. The saman may await re-incarnation by means of some woman in the same abusua.

There is some variation in Ashanti funeral rites according to the status of a deceased as detailed by Rattray (1927), but the fundamental beliefs and practices relating to death are the same for everyone. The size of a funeral is determined by the age, status, occupation, and personality of the deceased. The size of an Ashanti funeral reflects the accomplishments of the deceased (Dennis Warren 1973:19). As Nketia (1969:5) mentions, there are limits to an Ashanti funeral dictated by birth, social relationships, and circumstances of death. He states:

The funerals of kings and people of royal birth are not celebrated in exactly the same way as that of common people. Nor is accidental death or death by suicide or death through childbirth or death suspected to be caused by witchcraft, sorcery or poison regarded and celebrated in the same way as death through "normal illness" or old age (1969:5).

According to Nketia (6), these variations are not reflected in funeral dirges. He says it is sufficient to consider the funeral celebration in general terms because there is a basic similarity of format.

Nketia (1969:7) indicates that there are usually no less than five phases to an ordinary funeral: the preparation, the pre-burial mourning (including wake-keeping), the interment, after-burial mourning, and subsequent periodic mourning.

Busia (1927:23), Amponsah (1974:98), and Rattray (1927:148) mention that when a person is dying, water is poured down his/her throat. Nketia (1969:7) notes that "when the circumstances of a person's death prevent this last drink merely because there was no near relation to administer it, the death is considered all the more grievous." The significance of this act of pouring a drink down the throat of the dying person lies in the fact that Ashantis believe that the dead make a journey to Asamando, the land of the dead, by climbing a steep hill. The last drink is never omitted, since it makes the climbing of the hill easier. Rattray says,

. . . the watchers by the death-bed are expected, at the moment the soul leaves the body, to pour a little water down the throat of the person who is dying, with these words: ". . . Receive this water and drink, and do not permit any evil thing to come whence you are setting out (1927:148).

According to Rattray (149) an Ashanti lives in dread of "passing over" without someone to perform this last pious rite, and it is considered a disgrace to relatives to have omitted to do so. This is the reason an old Ashanti of any standing will seldom set out even on a very short journey unless accompanied by a child or an attendant who would be ready to perform this duty should death suddenly come.

Ashanti funerals begin with the preparation of the corpse for the occasion of the celebration and the journey of the deceased to the other world. Washing the dead body is an important aspect of Ashanti funeral rites. Rattray (1927:149) says hot water, a new sponge, and a new towel are used. He gives no reason for the use of a new sponge and towel, but I suspect newness symbolizes the new status of the deceased. The new body is not the same as the previous body.¹⁸ Dennis Warren (1973:19) reports that during the washing of the dead body no wailing is allowed. I think wailing at this stage might bring the neighbors immediately to the spot, and it is not good to have the dead body prepared for the funeral in the presence of the general public. Only close relatives should see the deceased at this stage. The exclusion of outsiders at this stage, I suspect, is to prevent the disclosure of any disgraceful thing (for example, rashes) that might be found on the deceased. Warren (1973:19) states that the body is bathed three times, the maternal kin

¹⁸ Van Gennep (1960) notes that an immense variety of rites involve a rebirth in a new status, either for the individual or the whole society.

washing the right side and the paternal kin (i.e., ntoro group), the left. No reason has been given for this symbolic act of washing the body three times or for the division of washing labor. Washing the body three times (a common symbolic number), I think, indicates care and attention and carries favor with ancestors. The ancestors are believed to have powers to reward and punish. I suspect that the maternal kin group washes the right side of the dead body, because to the Ashantis the right is more important than the left, and in a matrilineal system the dead body belongs more to them than the paternal kin group.¹⁹ The nails of the deceased are trimmed, and the hair is done in a way

¹⁹ Sarpong (1974:95) outlines some of the values that Ghanaians in general attach to the left hand and the right hand. Ghanaians, he says, associate filth, uncleanness, disgrace, disrespect, shame, and vice with the left hand. To point something out with the left hand or beckon with the left hand is considered discourteous. If one cannot but use the left hand in a situation where such use of the left hand is not socially allowed, because one's right hand is occupied, one must excuse him or herself verbally, or put the right hand under the left, as if to say: "I would give it with the right hand, if I could." Sarpong says Ashantis say audibly "I do not give with the left hand." Ashantis have a proverb, "No one points to his village with his left hand," that is, everyone thinks his or her village is better than any other. In shaking hands with two or more people by way of greeting, Ashantis start from the right to the left. This predominance of the right hand over the left hand is not peculiarly Ashanti. Hertz's essay (1960) on the almost universal representation of positive and negative moral qualities through the opposition of the right and left hands is one of the classic studies in body symbolism. I agree with him that there is a nearly universal association of the right hand with good and the left hand with evil. Indeed this phenomenon is worldwide, either in the use of the different languages of the world or in ideas or in actual behavior. For example, to indicate in the English language that someone has an evil intention one would say the person has a sinister motive ("sinister" being a latin word which means left). To indicate that what a person is saying is true, one would say the person is right. A good person who leads a good Christian life is said to practise righteousness.

that befits the age and sex of the deceased. Nketia (1969:7) indicates that cleaning the deceased is never omitted under normal circumstances. The body must be clean so mourners can sit around it comfortably and so it can set out on the inevitable journey.

Rattray (1927:149) says that rum is often poured down the throat of the dead body. He believes the purpose is to retard the process of decomposition, but he admits the idea of embalming appears to be not entirely unknown to the Ashantis. He says,

In the case of a great man being killed in war, or dying far away from home, the intestines were removed through the anus and the abdomen stuffed with certain leaves. The corpse was then placed on a rack and smoked over a slow fire (1927:149).

According to Rattray various forms of "ghost currency" (saman sika) in the form of ornaments of a certain shape and design are bound around the wrists of a dead body. Gold dust is often put into its ears. The body is dressed in its best cloth and adorned with every available gold ornament. It is then laid on its left side, generally with the hands folded against the cheek, sometimes with "a silk handkerchief between them to wipe off the sweat that comes from climbing the hill" (Rattray, 1927:150). The corpse is normally stretched on a special bed to lie in state for few hours before burial.

Nketia (1969:7) indicates that, while the dead body is being prepared to be laid in state, messengers are sent to inform all relations in the town and neighboring villages and other people associated with the deceased about the funeral. If the deceased

is a person holding office in the state or is in a lineage entrusted with a particular duty in the state, the chief and the queenmother are informed, even though they may not attend the funeral. Amponsah (1975:58), on the other hand, seems to suggest that no matter what the status of the deceased, the chief of a village has to be informed immediately of a person's death; otherwise, the funeral wail should not be performed. If notification of the chief does not occur, there may be a fine. Relatives, friends, and all those who matter are informed well in advance of a pending funeral. Then the relatives who have the responsibility of arranging the funeral prepare for it. They may buy drinks, rent chairs, and arrange for one or other traditional band to perform. The expenses incurred during funerals are very high and cause a great deal of financial strain for families. Donations are normally given by relatives and sympathizers. Amponsah (1975:63) sees the most important aspect of the funeral as the presentation of gifts in the form of money to the bereaved family. He says the amount given depends on the drinks given to the sympathizer. From my personal observation I think that in most cases people determine well in advance the amount they want to give and do not always use the drink offered them as yardstick. Normally, announcements are made to mention the donor and amount donated. After the celebration of a funeral, the income and expenditures of the funeral are calculated. When there is a debt, the successor of the dead person takes the greater part, leaving the remainder to be shared

by other members of family.

With the dead body dressed up and lying in state, sympathizers and relatives living far and near pour in one by one and in groups. The importance of the lying in state is to enable relatives and friends to have a last look at the deceased. Lying in state also honors the dead. During this time the personal belongings of the deceased are exhibited to demonstrate the status and wealth of the deceased. During this period sympathies are expressed through customary greetings, shaking of hands, and the circumstances of death are narrated. Blood relatives, friends and sympathizers wail and sing funeral dirges in honor of the deceased and other dead relatives whose memories are evoked by the present death.²⁰ The circumstances surrounding the death are reflected in the dirges.

Except where custom specifically enjoins silence, as for example in the forty-day period before some of the yearly festivals, it is generally the Ashanti way to celebrate funerals in the context of much singing, drumming and dancing. Dancing is a form of expression which may be usefully employed in rejoicing, mourning, and worship. The Ashantis are well known for their funeral dirges, of which Nketia (1969) has conducted a detailed study. Ashanti funeral dirges show the kind of thoughts

²⁰ All these events last several hours, normally from eleven in the morning to six in the evening. In order that the activities of the funeral can be performed effectively Ashanti funerals, like many other funerals, are usually protracted.

that arise in the event of death.²¹ In the dirges there are reflections on mortality, bereavement, and the privations of those left behind. There are references to the domicile of the ancestors, the deceased (who is frequently addressed), the journey, and unseen world of the dead. There are dirges for clans and lineages as well as dirges for ntoro groups. The funeral refers to kinship structure and the system of relations that embraces both the living and the dead.²²

Mourners are expected to fast while the funeral is in progress. As a rule anyone who sings a dirge at a funeral is expected to refrain from eating anything that day no matter whose funeral it is. Nketia (1969:14) suggests that the singing of the dirge is linked with fasting so mourners will feel the pathos of the occasion. Amponsah (1975:62) notes that friends and sympathizers can eat rice, kenkey, or porridge and drink tea or soup. They should however eat neither fufu nor ampesi.²³ Close relatives abstain from eating anything at all except drinking and chewing kola. It is, however, customary for grandchildren to eat at the death of a grandparent. During the funeral celebration they group together and force the chief mourners to give them money to buy food for themselves. Grandchildren, some of whom may

²¹ See Appendix One for examples of the funeral dirges and for further explanation.

²² Ties of kinship are not severed by death; it is because death makes physical separation inevitable that there is so much sorrow at funeral.

²³ Kenkey, fufu, and ampesi are the common staple food.

themselves be parents, going round asking for money for food because a grandparent is dead are a common sight at Ashanti funerals. They sing and pound the ground with sticks to indicate they will spoil the success of the funeral unless their demand for food is met.

The children are informed of a death as the deceased lies in state. Amponsah (1975:60) says this informing is done by giving children boiled eggs with the eldest child receiving his/hers first. Amponsah claims the importance of this rite is to separate the spirit of the deceased from the children and to formally announce the death to them.

Sarpong (1974:31) observes that widows and widowers may wear raffia on their elbows. It signifies that that their partners in marriage are dead. They have become as light as raffia; there is nobody to support them. He also says that, when a person is wearing leaves or has leaves in the mouth, it signifies that the deceased person is no more: the mourner, as it were, has nothing to eat but leaves. According to Sarpong those who wear leaves at a funeral are usually those whose fathers have died previously and are now observing the funeral rites of their father's brothers. If their father's brothers die before their father, they do not wear leaves.²⁴

Rattray says the maternal blood relations smear lines of red clay on their foreheads and on the upper part of the arms.

²⁴ I find this part of Sarpong's explanation unconvincing, because for the matrilineal Ashanti one's mother's brothers are most important.

Relatives who are priests must smear themselves with white clay.

Warren (1973:20) says if a dead person is very old, the corpse and the bodies of the living grandchildren are smeared with white clay, a mark of victory for having lived long and produced many offspring.

Sometimes the head of a dead body is shaved and marked with alternate red, white, and black stripes (made with red dye, white clay and charcoal). Marking is done to enable the living readily to recognize the dead body should the dead person return as a ghost (Rattray, 1927:150). Amponsah (1975:59), however, thinks that the shaving and marking of the head with red, white, and black strips is only done if the deceased is a head of family, so as to be able to recognize him when he arrives at the land of the dead.²⁵

Mourning bands are fastened round the head, and mourning cloths are put on by mourners. Sarpong (1974:32) says that the color of the mourning cloth indicates whether a mourner is closely related to a deceased person or not. Orange clay on the shoulders and forehead, along with an orange cloth, shows that the mourner is very closely related to the deceased. A black

²⁵ Turner (1967) claims that there exists an almost universal color triad of red, white, and black. In many societies, white relates to such things as purity and fertility, red to both good and evil aspects of power and life, and black to decomposition and death. Turner suggests that the wide distribution of this symbolic color triad may relate to the association of these colors with bodily fluids; especially white with milk and semen, and red with blood. Black, he notes, is rarely associated with a body excretion, but tends to be associated with loss of consciousness such as when one faints or "blacks out" (1967:89).

cloth indicates that the mourner is related to the deceased but not as closely as those wearing red. Other dark cloths are often a sign that one is a sympathizer rather than a mourner.

For close relatives mourning clothes and sobriety of living are prescribed for a full year, and normally a widow/widower cannot remarry for at least a year.

A widespread feature of funerals pertains to the mourners' hair. Leach (1958) notes that practices involving special cutting of the hair have a worldwide distribution, and they are particularly prominent in funeral rites. Frequently, close kin are enjoined to shave their heads as a sign of mourning, and the case of Ashanti is no exception. Ashanti women have a special hair-cut for funeral celebrations; it is not uncommon to see their hair shaved, especially around the forehead.

Different accounts have been given of close relatives shaving their heads. Warren (1973:20) reports that blood relatives shave and heap their hair at the entrance of the deceased's house, and that a great amount is an honor for the deceased. Sarpong (1974:32), on the other hand, says close relatives of the deceased may be shaved completely after a funeral, and the hair of their head placed on the tomb of the deceased. He explains that it is therefore easy to make out people who have recently performed the funeral rites of their close relatives. I think what happens is that the hair is shaved and placed at the entrance of the deceased's house. Later it is collected and placed on the tomb of the deceased. Rattray

(1927:149) recalls that he was informed by some Ashantis that hair is a form of money or has some value in the world of the dead.²⁶

On the day of a husband's death a widow(s)²⁷ smears her face, arms, and legs with red powder. According to Nketia (1955:35) the widow undergoes her widow rites in honor of her husband. These consist of a number of attitudes which she assumes or of dramatic actions which she performs sometimes alone, at other times in the company of sympathetic mourners. She must fast, undo her hair, go barefoot, wear signs of mourning, and have her hair shaved at some stage in the funeral. Widowers also undergo special rites, but they are not as striking as those of widows.²⁸

Mourners are often seen joining their two hands by intertwining the fingers and placing them on the head or behind the neck. Sarpong (1974:114) explains that this expresses deep sorrow, particularly on the occasion of the death or funeral rites of a very dear one.

If the deceased is a chief, palace attendants, princes and

²⁶ Today, shaving the head is often avoided by paying a fee.

²⁷ Some Ashantis practice polygyny.

²⁸ Hertz (1960) points out the differential treatment of kin during funerals. He mentions that each relationship severed by death leaves some living persons reduced, and that the harsh prescriptions for widow/widower and close kin suggests that they partake to some extent in the condition of the deceased. He says close kin, wherever they happen to be, are immediately struck by the "petrifying thunderbolt" when a death occurs. More distant kin are affected to a lesser extent (Hertz 1960:39).

grandprinces go to the market for looting, probably because it is regarded as improper that traders, instead of going to the palace to pay their last respects to the chief, should engage themselves in gainful pursuits.

Amponsah (1975:58) says a corpse is laid in state for a few hours in the father's house before burial. But if the deceased is from a royal family, it is laid in state at the house of the head of the royal family. The norm, I think, is for the corpse to be laid in state at the family house, and the interval between this stage and the burial depends to a large extent on the status of the dead person and the condition of the corpse. In the past the body lay for as long as the smell was bearable, usually for some three days (Nketia, 1969:14). But presently it scarcely lies for over a day.

Before the corpse is put into the coffin for burial, the chief has to be informed. Guns are fired²⁹ to indicate that it is time to put the corpse into the coffin. The physical separation of the deceased from the community to which he/she belonged is felt a great deal at this moment. The chief of the village or town sends one of his linguists to bid farewell to the deceased. Libations are poured by the family as well as the representative of the chief to ask blessings for the state and the family to avoid such frequent disasters. Libations are also poured on behalf of those who were named after the deceased to tell the

²⁹ The symbolic meaning of firing guns may have to do with the warriorship of the deceased. Ashantis are well known for the battles they fought in the past.

spirit that their names are no more connected with his or hers.

The moment when the corpse is put into the coffin and when it is taken away for burial is a very difficult one for mourners, many of whom get highly emotional and wail and sing intensely.

Only very close relations of a dead person see the ceremony of placing a dead body in a coffin (Sarpong 1974:29). Relatives and friends then give presents of gold dust, cloths, blankets, mats and pillows for the deceased to take into the world of spirits, where it is believed they will be needed as on earth (Busia 1968:23).³⁰ Sarpong (1974:29) reports that all the presents are placed in the coffin with the last person to put the gift into the coffin being the deceased person's widow or widower. The idea of using these things in the next world explains why in the past attendants were killed to accompany a chief into the world of spirits; they were to continue their services to him (Busia 1968:23).

Ashantis believe that a dying person has to be ferried across a very big river,³¹ and a newly dead person has to give

³⁰ The practice of giving a deceased presents to take into the "next world" is not peculiar to the Ashantis, but widely spread. Kalish (1977:6), for example, gives an account of it among the Finnish and Tentons. According to Kalish a deceased is provided with various implements which might be needed in the next world, and a deceased's necessities include money which among the Finnish is put either in the mouth of the deceased or in the coffin.

³¹ This belief seems to be widely spread; Hertz (1960), for example, gives an account of it among the Berawan. Kalish (1977:6) in his account of customs associated with death and burials in Finnish culture says one has to be very careful not to put any metal objects nor garments containing metal into the coffin because, according to Finnish ideas, metal burns like

presents to one of the agents of death standing near the river (Amponsah 1977:98). It is therefore essential for a dead body to be buried with presents.

Apart from the ritual of putting things in a coffin, the male in-laws of the deceased are expected to "kill" sheep prior to the deceased's final entry into a coffin. This rite consists of paying a sum of money termed "sheep." No self-respecting in-law will refuse to "kill the sheep."³²

Before a coffin is sealed for burial, a widow or widower is called to say a final farewell to the spirit of the deceased. A corpse is sometimes put in a locked room with a widow or widower for a short period in order to say farewell. This rite is performed to enable the living partner and the deceased to "discuss" anything secret between them.

The treatment of the dead bodies of infants and childless people in Ashanti funeral rites is worth mentioning. The dead body of an infant, especially in a case where the mother loses children at childbirth, is marked. The marking enables her recognize the return of the same child. It is believed that in such situations, it is the same child who comes and goes, intentionally trying to disturb the poor mother. Ashantis believe that by marking the infant's dead body it will not return

sparks when a deceased is crossing the river. Kalish also says the Finnish have a belief that a deceased needs money to pay the ferryman on the river.

³² There is no evidence that literal sheep were once sacrificed.

again.³³ A baby is not thought to have relinquished completely the other world from where it came. It does not properly belong to this world yet. If it dies, the full funeral celebrations are not gone through. The parents are not supposed to show external signs of grief and may even be requested to put on white cloth as a sign of joy and happiness (Sarpong, 1974:39).

People who are of age and die without having children also have their bodies marked and maltreated to prevent them from returning again. The reason for such maltreatment is that they refused to help replenish the family, which is so much treasured, and therefore they are useless. They should not be reincarnated,³⁴ and their names should be blotted out of memory.³⁵

With the corpse in the coffin and sealed, it is hurried

³³ Another way of stopping infant death at childbirth is to give funny names to the newly born, especially, if the child is born immediately following a series of infant death (Sarpong, 1974:89). Normally, marks are made on the cheeks or around the lips of newborns to indicate the baby's "enslavement." The funnier or uglier the name, the better. With such a name the baby is believed to be ashamed to go back. This practice is the origin of such Ashanti names as "Incinerator," "Stone," "Dew," "Slave," etc.

³⁴ Ashantis have a strong belief in reincarnation. After death some ancestors are reborn into this world. Any ancestor who does not complete his work in this world might come back to complete it. Diviners are believed to be able to determine which ancestors have been reincarnated. A child who is believed to be a reincarnated ancestor is given the name Ababio which literally means "You have come again."

³⁵ Among Ashantis a teenager, who is married and has children is considered an adult, while an old person of, say, sixty, who is unmarried and has no children is not considered an adult. Such a person has no respect.

along to the burial place accompanied by a few people moving along quietly or singing dirges or songs. In some cases the hurried march of the small group may be replaced by the slower burial procession in which mourners singing dirges in parties of four or more take part, some walking in front of the coffin and others behind it. In the past the actual burial took place in the night but presently, day burials are the norm.

Usually, the dead body is buried in the ground. At the graveyard, before the coffin is finally buried, Busia (1954:201) says, the dead body is addressed by a member of the lineage:

You are leaving us today; we have performed your funeral. Do not let any of us fall ill. Let us get money to pay the expenses of your funeral. Let the women bear children. Life to all of us. Life to the chief (1954:201).

This wish expresses the sense of dependence on the dead. The newly dead are also asked to convey messages to the ancestors. The practice of addressing a corpse gives an indication of a relationship existing between the soul and the corpse. This seem not to be peculiar to the Ashantis (see, for example, Huntington and Metcalf 1979:74).

The return march from the place of burial is often done quietly. Mourning, however, continues until the end of the funeral has been declared and the eating of normal meals is once again permitted by the head of lineage. The burial, therefore, does not mark the end of the funeral rites. The post-burial mourning, which Nketia (1969:7) describes as the fourth phase of the funeral, may continue for some two or three days if the

burial took place soon after death. Sometimes this period is purposely curtailed in order that it may be celebrated in vigour during one of the recurring periods of remembrance. The activities of the post-burial phase normally include drumming, singing, and dancing.

The structure on which the deceased is laid in state is not taken down until the funeral is over. Mourners are, therefore, constantly reminded of the event (Nketia, 1969:14).

Nketia (14) notes that as the funeral goes on, the singers of dirges get worn out by slow degrees through singing, walking about, and fasting. Some lose their voices. The funeral dirge is heard with diminishing frequency and from fewer and fewer mourners, though it rarely ceases until the funeral is over. A sudden outburst is heard from time to time from a relative while all others may be resting. And so the funeral goes on until probably after the second or third day of burial, when fasting and mourning cease.

Sarpong (1974:30) draws a technical distinction between the day of burial and the funeral day. According to him the funeral day is a day set apart to remember the deceased in a special manner. He says, "This may be three days after burial; it may be two days afterwards; it may be six weeks subsequent to burial; it may be five years. In short, there may be any length of time between burial and funeral." As an example, he cites the king of Ashanti, Sir Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, who died in May, 1970 but whose funeral was observed in December, 1971. I think drawing

such a distinction is overdone. There are instances when the situation demands that a corpse be hurriedly disposed of without full funeral rites, but more often than not the day of burial is the funeral day. However, it is an Ashanti custom to observe the eighth day, fortieth day, eightieth day, and the first anniversary of a person's death as days of mourning. This sequence is what Nketia (1969:7) regards as the fifth or last phase of the funeral. Presently, this sequence is not strictly followed. It is increasingly becoming the practice for relatives to set aside one of these days for the celebration of a public memorial to which all concerned are invited. On such an occasion dirges are sung, though the obligation to sing the funeral dirge is not strong (Nketia 1969:16). A good part of the celebration is spent drumming, singing and dancing, serving drinks, giving gifts, and observing certain customs such as adosowa, a display of the wives of bereaved husbands. On other occasions of mourning the celebration may be a quiet one, though friends and sympathizers come to greet the mourners as soon as they know of the occasion.

Amponsah (1975:62) notes that most funeral days are observed during the cocoa season when people have money. Sarpong (1974:30) observes that traditionally, the days for funerals are Mondays and Thursdays, because they are believed to be propitious days. In more recent times Saturday is seen more as an appropriate day for funerals, because workers are free to attend.

Though Ashantis have held very largely to their traditional beliefs and practices regarding funeral rites, many changes are currently going on. Formal education, Christianity, new socio-political systems (established with the coming of colonialism to Africa), westernization, capitalism, urbanization, ethnic-pluralism and class formation have affected and continue affecting Ashanti funeral rites.

Culture is dynamic, never static. It is a mistake to think or suggest that there has not been any deviation in the practice of Ashanti funeral rites. For example, Rattray's account of the treatment of widows and the seemingly brutal slaughtering that followed a death of an Ashanti chief now belongs to history. Modern scientific ways of preserving the dead body are now employed, and the present alarming rate at which graves are being looted is preventing people from burying the dead with large quantities of gold dust. With the present use of hospitals, those who die are scarcely offered the last drink especially since people are seldom allowed to see the "passing over" of close relatives. Washing and dressing a corpse, especially one from the middle and upper classes, is done by professionals, often at a hospital mortuary, and announcements of funerals are made through the mass media. Posters are made for obituary notices often with a picture of the deceased.³⁶ Those who are

³⁶ See Appendix Three for an example of the obituary notice.

Christians³⁷ have their corpses sent to chapels for special services. Bulletins containing a deceased's life history, tributes, hymns to be sung during the service and the order of service are printed and given to those attending the funeral service. Sometimes instead of lying in state at a family house, they are laid in state in a chapel, and the singing of hymns or funeral songs composed by Christians is now an important feature especially during the wake-keeping. A Christian service is held before burial and in the course of the service, a short life history of the deceased is read. Arrangements are made for a clergyperson to come and pray, even at the funerals of those who are not church goers. Things are strictly under control such that a specific time for lying in state and for burial is fixed well in advance.

It is becoming the norm for the funerals of rich people to be video-recorded. People attending a funeral now dress in good taste to show dignity and respect for the family and occasion, and flowers are sent to the bereaved family in characteristic Western fashion. It used to be the case that those who were unable to attend the funeral rites of close relatives stood the chance of being ostracized. But, now those who have travelled far away from home are not under pressure to travel all the way back hence their organizing of funeral rites at their current place of residence. The celebration of funerals for dead relatives back

³⁷ Most Ashantis who have converted to Christianity still hold on to traditional beliefs no matter what their outward appearance.

home in Ghana is one of the types of funerals Ashantis perform in Canada. Not surprisingly, Busia (1954:191) states that Ashantis are undergoing a social change that may be described as a revolution. However, the transformations of Ashanti funeral rites cannot be said to be so profound as to leave nothing of the traditions. As Busia (1954:209) notes, "On the social level, and in certain details of conduct, Christianity is influencing Ashanti society; but in matters like birth or funeral rites, where questions of the interpretation of the universe come in, the influence of Christianity is slight; for the Ashanti to a large extent still retain their own interpretation of the universe and of the nature of man and society" (1954:209).

Ashantis say, "Everyone has to climb the ladder of death." Sometimes this view is put in the form of a question: "Who will death spare?" Seeing death as inevitable, Ashantis regard funerals as a duty, and no pains are spared to make them memorable. The kinds of questions that are asked after a funeral are, "How was the attendance?" and "Was it exciting?" Funerals to the Ashanti must be successful, and the answers to these questions are an indicator of their success or failure. Not infrequently, one hears comments on refreshments, how individuals behaved, and on other activities such as the way the dancing went and how much money was collected in donation.

Funerals are very important and will continue to be so for the Ashantis. They are at the very base of their belief system, upon which all other things rest. This fact becomes clear on

examination of the role of their ancestors. As Pobee (1973:5) comments, the entire funeral rites have considerable therapeutic effect and are therefore not meaningless.

The question that now arises is whether the Ashanti, who finds him or herself in North America is still able to adhere to traditional Ashanti concepts and funeral practices. The hypothetical answer that most Ashantis in Toronto give is, "To a large extent, yes." If so, in what way? What difficulties stand in the way? What innovations and traditions exist? Before I look at these questions, it is imperative to look at Canadian concepts of death and funeral practices, for it is in the light of these that Ashanti immigrants in Toronto strive to uphold their traditions. Ashantis in Toronto have been influenced by Canadian funeral practices. When an aspect of a people's culture is transported to another cultural environment, it usually incorporates elements of the host culture.

Among Canadians

The sources for this section are mainly secondary materials. Most of the books deal specifically with the United States but, since they concentrate largely on the practices of funeral homes, I have relied on them because these practices are largely the same in Canada. The structure of the funeral rite is defined to a large degree by the funeral director. The director directs the action of the entire rite, especially if the people involved are unsure of what to do.

The literature on death in North America is largely polemical, pervaded by value-laden and ethnocentric assessments. On the one hand, there are exposes of the North American death industry as illustrated, for example, by the writing of Robert Forrest (1967), Jessica Mitford (1963), and Evelyn Waugh (1948). On the other hand, as Huntington and Metcalf (1979:186) point out, there are writings combining in different proportions psychological insight with homely advice on how to approach one's own death and the deaths of those who are near and dear. Examples of the latter include Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1975), and Lisa Carlson (1987). The following quotation, by Forrest (1967:11) from the Canadian Funeral Service Magazine (1965:14) gives some indication of the pitfalls embedded in the literature:

The authors [of articles and books condemning the funeral business] knew little if anything about the practice of funeral directing and have taken isolated incidents and generalized from these incidents, alleging that fraudulent and abusive practices are widespread in our field (Forrest 1967:11).

Forrest (11) says this comment is typical of the manner in which funeral directors dismiss criticism of their business. According to him, while it is true that the critics of funeral directing were poorly informed or given to sensational writing, this fact would not constitute "unreasonable grounds upon which to discount the validity of criticism" (1967:11).

Jessica Mitford (1963:22) says the funeral directors feel that by steering customers to the higher-priced caskets, they are giving the customer the first dose of grief therapy. To illustrate this point she quotes from the National Funeral

Service Journal (1961):

A funeral is not an occasion for a display of cheapness. It is, in fact, an opportunity for the display of a status symbol which, by bolstering family pride, does much to assuage grief. A funeral is also an occasion when feelings of guilt and remorse are satisfied to a large extent by the purchase of a fine funeral. It seems highly probable that the most satisfactory funeral service for the average family is one in which the cost has necessitated some degree of sacrifice. This permits the survivors to atone for any real or fancied neglect of the deceased prior to his death.

(National Funeral Service Journal, August 1961)

The purpose of this section is neither to criticize nor justify Canadian concepts of death and funeral practices but to describe them. To help overcome the subjectivities imbedded in the literature my method for this section entails comparative examination of the secondary sources, coupled with interviewing a few Canadians who in one way or the other have been involved in Canadian funeral rites.³⁸

Canadian society is generally described as multicultural. One would expect that funeral practices in Canada would vary widely among regions, social classes, or ethnic groups. According to Huntington and Metcalf (1979:187), despite the heterogeneity of American society the odd fact is that North American funeral practices do not vary much. They assert that the overall form of funerals is remarkably uniform, and its general features include rapid removal of the corpse to a funeral parlor, embalming,

³⁸ In the summer of 1990 Darlene Juschka (then a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University) undertook fieldwork on funeral rites as seen in the Edward R. Good Funeral Home. The report of her fieldwork is a source for this section.

institutionalized viewing, and disposal by burial. I think this uniformity is largely accounted for by the presence of funeral homes.

Superficially, the Canadian concept of death is based on the Christian religion.³⁹ However, Canadians claim adherence to a number of different denominations, whose formal doctrines on the fate of the soul in death are dissimilar, making it difficult for one to have a uniform picture of how precisely Canadians conceive death. While the Roman Catholic notion of purgatory is not shared by Protestants, Mormons are unique in believing that it is possible to arrange the salvation of unconverted kin who are long dead. A number of dissimilarities concerning how different denominations conceive death are cited in Grollman (1974:141).

Even within the same denomination, like for example the Protestants, there are further varieties. As Huntington and Metcalf (1979:189) point out, these are formal doctrines, and it is difficult for one to know the degree of faith that ordinary practitioners have in them. Even more opaque are the views of those who claim no affiliation to any organized religious sect. Just how Canadians conceive of death therefore remains a debatable issue.

Although it is not easy to specify how Canadians conceive of death, there are attitudes toward death that are held which

³⁹ The majority of Canadians I have interviewed on the subject claim Canada is a Christian nation, implying that Christian values dominants all spheres of life.

distinguish their views from those of the Ashantis and other societies in other times and places. Sudnow's work (1967) suggests that it is not in the representations of organized religion that one can find these attitudes, but in something more pervasive, scientific medicine. According to Huntington and Metcalf (1979:204) the development of powerful new drugs and of reliable and safe surgical techniques, together with improvements in diet, have enabled the "inevitability" of death to be redefined. They state:

Formerly, for instance in medieval times, death was everywhere, in all its ugliness and suffering. It might pick out anyone. In contemporary America it is removed to the hospital . . . (1979:204).

Parsons (1963:61-3) asserts that modern medicine has not greatly increased the maximum lifespan that a person can hope for, but it has greatly improved the chances of reaching the ripe age for death. This conception of death, according to Huntington and Metcalf (1979:205), frames a view of the proper life that confounds the medieval view of a proper death. They say the key notion is fulfillment: "The life of the individual should rise in an arc through brassy youth to fruitful middle years, and then decline gently toward a death that is acceptable as well as inevitable." Accidents, however, do occur and death comes from various angles.

The majority of deaths now occur in hospitals, where the fiction of probable recovery is often maintained until a person is near the point of death (Huntington and Metcalf 1979:194-5). Upon dying a person is attended by the medical people who

certify that the person is dead. This certification appears normal in the Canadian context of specialists and experts, but implicit in this practice are two facts: no one else can certify a person dead but a medical person, and a person is not recognized as being dead until certified as such. At the very outset, then, death is a legal issue. Nothing can happen to the deceased until the proper forms are signed. The corpse is tagged by the medical people and then placed in a plastic bag to be picked up by the funeral home representative. The corpse is removed without the aid of the bereaved, who see it again only under very special circumstances, after it has been embalmed and dressed up to appear asleep.

According to Sudnow (1967:154-63) when death occurs, the immediate family have the right to know within minutes or hours and expect to be informed in person or over the telephone. The greater speed of the telephone is normally taken into account if there is a risk that the immediate family will learn of the death in an improper way. The doctor is often the first to know and will try to impede the spread of the news until he or she has talked to those entitled to learn it directly. Other visitors who happen to be at the hospital are only told if the doctor is confident that they cannot "leak" it to close kin. Sometimes this procedure requires delicate maneuvering. Thereafter, people ideally learn from someone who stood in approximately the same degree of intimacy to the deceased, and in rough order of intimacy. Some discussion is often necessary to decide who

should telephone whom, since the urgency, or lack of it, with the close kin, close friends, and relatives constitutes an evaluation of the importance of the person in the life of the deceased and in the estimation of the survivors.

Relatives of a deceased are notified by a member of the family immediately; it is embarrassing for close relatives to learn of the death of a relative by a second party or through a newspaper notice. Obituary notices are sometimes arranged for a notification of death. The funeral director works closely with the news staff of a newspaper and normally assists a family in seeing that the death is properly reported to news staff. A charge is made by major metropolitan newspapers if a death notice is placed in the classified obituary column.

As in the case of the Ashantis, euphemistic expressions are used in reporting the death. The commonest is speaking of the deceased as having "passed on" (Huntington and Metcalf 1979:195). Mitford (1963:19) notes several euphemisms within the entire funeral context. She says euphemisms such as "slumber room," "reposing room," and "calcination--the kindlier heat" abound in the funeral business. Huntington and Metcalf (1979:195) claim the professional titles used by undertakers have grown increasingly euphemistic: "mortician," reminiscent of such medical specialists as optician; "funeral director," suggestive of business or perhaps the stage; and most recently "grief counselor," a kind of terminal marriage counselor. Kaut (1952:7) suggests that these euphemisms may have less to do with the insecurities of the

public over mortality than with the insecurities of the specialists over their professional status. He says the titles represent a desire to shake off their pallid public image and acquire more of the eclat of the medical profession. According to Huntington and Metcalf (1979:195) although other causes may be involved, the euphemisms can be seen as shying away from confrontation with mortality.

Sending a sympathy card, even if a person is only an acquaintance, is not uncommon. Sending flowers is another way of expressing sympathy to the family of a deceased in Canada. Flowers are supposed to express a feeling of life and beauty. Florists claim they offer much comfort to the family.

When a corpse is picked up from a hospital by a representative of a funeral home, chosen by the deceased, family, or executor, it is transported to a cool room where, on a metal table, it is prepared (washed, embalmed, and dressed). Although this is part of the funeral, it is not shared with any of the bereaved family.

In contrast to Ashanti practice, the corpse is washed by a specialist who is unknown to the deceased and the bereaved family. For the specialist to leave visible dirt on the body is to offend the family who will pay for the funeral and give visible proof that the job was not well done. As in the case of the Ashantis, although the body is a thing needing to be disposed of, it will be viewed by family and friends and therefore should be neat and clean.

After washing the body comes the embalming. Embalming is treated by embalmers as the medical function of their role as funeral directors. They make the body both safe to approach and presentable:

I wish to submit that it is vastly more inhumane to present a bloated, purging and sometimes stinking body to the bereaved, leaving in their consciousness the fact that the semblance of one whom they have loved has become a thing unclean, than it is to prepare the body in such a manner as to bring some measure of consolation to the bereaved (Spriggs 1971:62).

Spriggs (1971) has given a detailed account of the process of embalming, of which the scope of this dissertation does not permit a detailed summary. Briefly stated, the corpse putrefies from the inside out. The blood, ordinarily in liquid form, and the organs, normally in a state of viscosity, begin to change the seemingly solid nature of the body to a viscerous one. The innards become more liquid and gaseous. Unless this process is retarded with a drying agent, the body continues to break down and separate its three elemental states: gas, liquid, and solid. The embalmer inhibits this process, and before the separation can take place it stabilizes the body's decomposition. The embalmer removes as much blood as possible from the body and injects as much formaldehyde⁴⁰ as required to retard the process of decomposition.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Formaldehyde is a preservative, and it preserves by dehydration.

⁴¹ The embalming takes about three to four hours, but in the case of a car accident it may take half a day, depending on the restorative work that has to be done (Juschka 1990:31).

Huntington and Metcalf (1979:196) suggest that what embalming clearly does prevent is the confrontation of the mourners with the process of putrescence in the corpse. They say this horror of corruption may be seen as a special case of the general aversion to bodily processes, of which the American stress on hygiene is a part. It is their argument that the process of embalming itself represents more than an illusory negation of death. They ask: "If Americans really associated preservation of the corpse with perpetuation of life, would there not be a demand for true mummification, as there was in ancient Egypt?" I agree with them that current embalming practices generally only impede decomposition by a few weeks, because the use of high concentrations of preservative fluids evidently makes it harder to produce a lifelike appearance for display purposes. They conclude that techniques exist to do a much more permanent job, but they are not in demand. They cite an instance when a funeral director was obliged to move a coffin to allow a road expansion a year or so after interment. The corpse turned out to be perfectly preserved, and the undertaker, proud of his handiwork invited the close kin to come and inspect it, but they emphatically refused. What this anecdote illustrates is that in North America embalming is for a specific ritual purpose. Unlike the Ashanti, once the funeral is completed the family have no further desire to see or think about the lost member they have

buried (Huntington and Metcalf 1979:196).⁴²

The third part of the preparation of the corpse is the dressing and placing of the deceased in the casket. If too pale or discolored, then make-up is applied. Normally a male deceased is dressed in a suit and a female in a dress or night dress (Juschka 1990:32). The head is pillowed on satin, and the hands are folded on the stomach.

The casket is chosen by the family prior to the embalming procedure. The family or executor is taken to the casket room where they can see the funeral home's selection and make a choice. Huntington and Metcalf (1979:195) comment that coffins or caskets are selected for their superior padding, as if comfort mattered to the corpse.

Between the period of preparing the corpse and visitation the funeral service is normally set, and the method of disposing of the remains is agreed upon; however, this can vary since funerals can be pre-arranged.

When the deceased is made up to appear asleep and placed in the casket, visitation, the next stage in the funeral rites begins. The deceased is taken to the visitation room, otherwise called slumber room, of the funeral home. The flowers sent by family and friends are placed on stands at either end of the

⁴² According to Huntington and Metcalf (1979:196) the response of Americans to cryogenic suspension (i.e., the deep freezing of the body for later revival) validates this point. At the time of their writing, relying on Dempsey (1975), they claim cryogenic suspension has been available for a decade, yet at that time there was a grand total of just fifteen people in suspension (Dempsey 1975:191).

casket by the funeral director. The immediate family's flowers are placed closest to the casket. The lid of the casket remains open for the entire duration of the visitation process and is not closed until just prior to the funeral service; unless it is a closed casket funeral.

The period of visitation is generally for a day or two, and the funeral service is commonly held on the third day. Visitation normally occurs in the afternoon and evening from two until five, and seven until nine. Preceding the funeral service may be a third time of visitation. The first to arrive at the funeral home for the visitation is the family, and they are shown by the funeral director to the room that holds their dead family member. Then come the sympathizers. Juschka (1990:17) observes that it is common for sympathizers first to talk to the family, second to look at the deceased, third to sign the funeral book⁴³ and finally to return again and speak with the family. Pine (1975:95) asserts that on entering, the mourner must first approach the casket. There is little show of emotion, but afterward it is appropriate to make some brief remark about how well the deceased looks. This pattern is established with the immediate family, who are the first to view the restored corpse. Generally, the reaction is relief and muted admiration.

Periodically, visitors approach the deceased, but most people, other than the immediate family, normally appear

⁴³ The funeral book, otherwise called the register, contains selected information regarding the funeral and service. It is given to the family at the end of the funeral rites.

uncomfortable if they come within an area two to three feet from the casket. Family members have a tendency to enter this area with greater ease and stay longer, but they too withdraw after a five-to ten-minute lapse of time.

Pine (1975:95-6) notes that there is an obligation not only to view the corpse, but also to say the correct things about it. Family and friends mingle freely during the visitation and viewing of the corpse, and often there is considerable sociability.

There may be more than one funeral going on, which can heighten the awareness of mourners that the funeral home is not their private home, and this knowledge puts a constraint on how much grief mourners are willing to express and how they are willing to express it. There is a prescribed funeral etiquette:

If the family is present when a person calls at the funeral home, sympathy should be expressed by clasping hands, an embrace, or a simple statement of condolence, such as: "My sympathy to you." "John was a fine person and a friend of mine. He will be missed." "My sympathy to your mother." The family members in return may say: "Thanks for coming." "John talked about you often." "I didn't realize so many people cared." "Come see me when you can" (Funeral Etiquette:9).

According to Huntington and Metcalf (1979:200) these usages are rapidly acquired, even by those who have not had occasion to employ them previously, because they conform to collective representations that are found in everyday contexts, not just in the situation of the funeral.

After the visitation comes the funeral service. The funeral service itself is preceded by a short period of visitation.

Generally, services occur at eleven in the morning or three in the afternoon. If the service is at eleven in the morning and in the funeral home chapel, then the family is usually in the funeral home by ten in the morning. If the service is to take place outside of the funeral home, then they arrive earlier to allow time to visit the deceased for the last time.

According to Funeral Etiquette wearing colorful clothing is no longer considered inappropriate for relatives and friends. Persons attending the funeral dress in good taste so as to show dignity and respect for the family and the occasion.

The funeral service, if religious, attempts to address the parting of the spirit from the body.⁴⁴ A Christian funeral service normally underscores the idea that the individual, who is essentially only a soul, has departed to heaven or some other place awaiting the call to heaven. The service also seeks to address the mourners' loss by telling them that the deceased has moved on to a better place because God willed it to be so in the beginning and in the moment. By his design we are all to die from this world and move on to God's world. For some death comes when they are young, for others it is when they are old.

Juschka (1990) notes that the sermon for the funeral of a young person gives a sense that the death which has occurred is

⁴⁴ Often people who were not religious in their lifetime, have a religious service held for them. Juschka (1990:40) mentions an example of a funeral service which was Christian even though it was known by the family of the deceased who buried her, and the minister who officiated at her service, that she openly rejected Christianity.

better sooner than later:

The child's new world is better than this earth, for it is a home of goodness and love. It is safe, lasting, secure, and removed from peril. The child is: safe in the arms of Jesus. Safe on his gentle breast. Remember also that this child will be spared the sorrows, sins, and stains of this earth (Christensen 1967:52).

The sermon for an elderly person speaks about a ripeness to life, a proper ending (Christensen 1967:43). There is a weariness of life and a desire to leave it for this other, "better" place. The above words are said in order to help mourners through grief. Christianity in its very nature denies the reality of death; the body is not the person but the spirit, and it is only the body that dies.

Music at the funeral service is an important aspect of Canadian funeral practice. The funeral director sometimes arranges with an organist to provide appropriate selections, or select recorded music often provided by the family from a deceased's favorite collection. The vocalist, choir, or ensemble can be part of the ceremony. Some church pastors recommend that friends and relatives participate in a group singing of a favorite hymn.

During the service a brief history of the deceased is read, and prayers are said for all, not excluding the deceased.

After the service is completed comes the procession to the cemetery and the burial of the deceased. Juschka (1990:37) notes that in the front cars leading the funeral procession are found the funeral director, clergyman, and pallbearers (traditionally men). The men/pallbearers do not ride with the casket. In the

family vehicle, which follows the coach are often found the female members of the family and the children.

As in the case of the Ashanti the norm is for one to be buried in the ground. Cemetery arrangements entail purchasing one or more graves. Normally, the family buys only what is needed as cemetery lots are not easy to re-sell. Some people, however, opt for cremation. As a matter of personal choice some persons prefer cremation to earth burial. Usually, a regular funeral service is held prior to cremation, but often the body is transferred to the crematorium without the presence of the family. There is a separate charge for cremation. An urn may be purchased to hold the ashes and may be interred in a columbarium niche or the family plot.

Concerning earth burial, with the family and other persons that accompanied the body to the grave or other place of committal standing by, the clergyman or other person in charge of committal offers a short prayer or other words of strength prior to committing the body to its final resting place. The often heard words that sum up the burial are: "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Sometimes there is a reception or gathering that follows the burial. The reception allows people to re-establish bonds and possibly form new ones.

The above is a generalized Canadian funeral practice.⁴⁵ The

⁴⁵ See Appendix Two for a chart outlining the variations and various stages in the Canadian funeral rites.

nature or size of a funeral for a deceased person in Canadian funeral practice is determined by age, status, occupation and personality; hence, a funeral for certain individuals involves the whole nation. For example, the funeral for a cabinet minister will be a state ceremony. It is also worthnoting that in Canadian funeral practice there is what is generally called a pre-arranged funeral. With regard to this, some people contact a funeral director in advance to make plans for their own funeral. It is also of interest to mention that some at death prefer parts of their body to be donated to hospitals to help those in need of them.

CHAPTER THREE

FUNERAL RITES AMONG ASHANTIS IN TORONTO

Ashanti Immigrant Experience and the Immigrant Community

The following statements are very similar to a number I recorded from Ashanti immigrants in Toronto:

I'll never forget my first years here. I was an unknown person among unknown people (Taki, restaurant owner).

We wouldn't come, you know, if there was enough bread in our own countries. We just wouldn't come. Isn't hunger as good a reason for immigration as anything else? Only hunger drives us here (Julia, rubber factory worker).

The early experiences you have as an immigrant are like experiences in the war. They are not all pleasant while you go through them, but afterwards you wouldn't change a thing. What's more, they give you a kind of strength (Dorothy, housewife).

You miss your own people when you come here. It's something you never think about before you come. It's something you could not imagine until you are here and the loneliness takes you over (Pete, technician).

When I first came here I wanted to be absorbed. It was almost an act of amputation I wanted to commit. I needed so much to be accepted as a Canadian (Marlene, unemployed) (Montero 1977:7).⁴⁶

A few of the tape recorded statements from Toronto Ashanti who were my informants are:

But for the economy at home, none of us would be here. No one wants to live in this cold. It is very terrible, especially, when you first get here right in the middle of the winter like it was in my case (Kofi,

⁴⁶ Montero (1977) interviewed a cross-section of middle and lower class immigrants in Canada from various countries all over the world.

electrician).

I was just overwhelmed by the Western technology, and I wondered whether I wasn't a university graduate. Indeed, my first experience here made me felt belittled but with my educational background it took me only a week to learn how to handle all the essential things like the bank instant machine (Ato, lawyer).

One thing that never leaves you is the fact that you miss everybody home. I keep thinking about what they might be doing at particular periods of the day. As an immigrant in a country far from home, your initial experience is a sort of mix-feeling (Ama, nurse).

At the beginning everything seem frustrating. I can speak English and I thought that was an advantage to getting a job really fast. However, job never came my way till after two months stay (Kojo, social worker).

Toronto is not made up of a single group of people.

Immigrants from Europe, Asia, Africa, and elsewhere settled in North America several years ago, seeking a new life filled with opportunities unavailable in their homeland. Immigrants did not abandon their ethnic traditions when they reached the shores of North America.⁴⁷ Each ethnic group has its own customs and traditions, and each brings different experiences, accomplishments, skills, values, styles of dress, and tastes in food that linger long after its arrival, and this profusion of differences creates a bond among the immigrants. The ingenuity and acts of the earlier immigrants shaped the Canadian way of life.

The history of humanity is a story of movement and adaptation to new environments and of the blending of blood and

⁴⁷ Robert Thompson (1984), for example, has given a brilliant account of the persistence of African traditions of art and culture in America.

the mixture of cultures, along with a constant, restless striving for "something better" (Scott 1972:3). As Jackson (1986:1) notes, human societies are not static and have generally been subject to disasters and wars which have caused migration, eviction, and the search for refuge. There is, therefore, a continuous process of immigration, and the Ashanti immigrants in Toronto are no exception.

Sociologists, geographers, economists and many others have propounded several theories to account for immigration. Consequently, the literature on migration and the immigrant experiences of various people is enormous. Surprisingly, however, I could not locate any literature dealing with Ashanti (or, even African) immigrant experience in Canada. This section, therefore, consists mainly of information gathered from my fieldwork, which consisted of ten months of interviewing Ashantis in Toronto. Not all the stories I gathered are included here, but they all form the basis of this section of the thesis. In order not to double the volume of this section, a selection had to be made from the vast amount of material recorded. No individual story presumes to represent in its entirety the Ashanti immigrant experience in Toronto. What is presented here is the collective story of Ashanti immigrants in Toronto.

I do not know the exact population of Ashantis in Toronto, but the evidence (based on their monthly sectional meetings and attendance at funerals) suggests they number in the thousands.

Quite a number of Ashantis came to Toronto many years ago.⁴⁸ Some of them are newcomers.

Various reasons are given by Ashanti immigrants for emigrating to Toronto. The reasons are political, social (marriage and education), but mainly economic. Toronto is chosen because of job opportunities and the fact that close kin are already there to provide initial support such as accommodation and food.

Coming from an "underdeveloped" country to a "developed" one, almost all the Ashantis that I interviewed say they were completely overwhelmed by the Western technology they initially encountered. They claim almost everything looked different and sometimes strange to them (for example, food, dress, behavior).

In contrast with immigrants who can hardly speak English, almost all the Ashanti immigrants I spoke with claim that the English language is not a problem to them because English is the official language of Ghana. However, some said they initially encountered problems due to what one Ashanti termed a "fascinating range of accents." That accents and jargon pose a major problem to most Ashanti immigrants in Toronto is illustrated by a story told to me by one graduate student. He said he wanted to board a bus, for which the fare was supposed to be one dollar and five cents. However, on asking about the fare from a Canadian standing by, he was told the fare was "a dollar-five." He took this to mean five dollars and paid five dollars

⁴⁸ Some have been in Toronto for over fifteen years.

instead of the one dollar and five cents; this happened at a time when he needed to save every cent he had. Unfortunately, the bus driver could not help him, because it was impossible to give change once the money was deposited. Another person having problems with accents said,

To make it worse, people tend to shout at you to get you to understand their accents. They seem to think that the louder they shout, the better you'll be able to understand (Kofi, a plumber).

People do not seem to be made fun of because of their accent or because their English is bad.⁴⁹

Those with close kin already in Toronto said that culture shock was cushioned for them, because in most cases they were tutored at home as to what to expect and what not to expect or do. However, they stress the fact that there is always a conflict between their accustomed way of doing things and what is proper in Toronto.

In the Ashanti traditional setting there is communal living with heavy dependence on a few wealthy kin. One can walk into the house of a brother, sister, aunt or uncle at anytime without notice and expect to be fed and accommodated. In Toronto the situation is different. An Ashanti student told me how he once phoned his aunt⁵⁰ with the intention of asking her for money

⁴⁹ Naturally, the case with children in school is different.

⁵⁰ Among the Ashantis a person's aunt is regarded as a person's mother because of the matrilineal system. There is a strong tendency for one to take offence if she is referred to as aunt instead of "mother."

only for the aunt to remind him that they were not in Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti.

There are instances of two or three brothers staying together and sharing most things in common, but generally immigrants also incorporate elements of individualism unknown in the Ashanti traditional setting. An Ashanti staying with his brother in the same house told me that, when he gets his time off from work, he normally walks around the streets. To him it is better to walk around than to be alone in his room. He says his brother has two children, is very busy, and so did not want him. He was lonely to the point of experiencing a nervous breakdown. He said that for nearly a year he stayed with his brother, who advised him to go out on his own. The majority of the Ashantis I interviewed, however, seem strongly to uphold the traditional Ashanti ideal of unity among kin.

Job searches are a frequent topic of conversation. Finding jobs, I am told, is not easy, and one is very lucky to get a job one is specifically trained for. Most Ashantis in Toronto think there is an element of bigotry when it comes to providing employment. Hence, quite a number are on welfare. There are, however, some Ashantis who have not only found themselves jobs but good ones for which they have been trained, and some have even worked so hard that they have become employers or supervisors. One such person told me he had to work extra hard to be noticed and promoted. Another person said that what he has been able to achieve here would have been impossible in Ghana. To

him an individual in Toronto has a lot more control over his or her destiny and future regardless of background. He claims that in Ghana who one is,⁵¹ where one was born, and where one's family stands on the social ladder are extremely important, but in Toronto all this is irrelevant. He says that in Ghana there is not much motivation to work hard, but in Toronto one has to work harder and faster because the output is much higher.

An Ashanti restaurant owner who has been in Toronto for seven years told me his first two years in Toronto were very tough, but he worked hard and sacrificed many things. He says,

If you really want to do it, you can get ahead. The ones coming now just want things easy. They expect to be treated like real Canadians from the first day. They have to learn that it doesn't happen that way. You have to start with the low jobs and humble yourself. With time you'll prove you are as good or even better than them. A lot of our people coming now want it easy. It seldomly happens that way if you are an immigrant.

⁵¹ By this he means tribal identity and problems such as favouritism, nepotism and inefficiency. In large measure, tribal identification in Ghana can become a substitute for objective expertise and qualification. One comes to find that it is not the person one is, but the range of persons one knows that determines one's fortunes in society. Almost invariably, the person one knows tends to be a person of one's own tribe. In Ghana there are instances in which people of a particular tribe predominate in certain offices or departments, presumably because of the tribal identity of the head of that office or department. Max Assimeng (1981:170) mentions the Post and Telecommunications departments, the Customs and Excise department, and the Prisons department as examples of organizations in Ghana which, at one time or the other, have been known to be tribal preserves. Assimeng says that with the removal of colonialism, there was then the task of distributing the benefits (i.e., assets, booties, patronage) of independence, and it was during the distribution of benefits that tribalism in the Ghanaian sense cropped up. Tribalism in Ghana, therefore, is a socio-political problem of "who gets what, when, how," as H.D. Lasswell (1936) puts it.

The work situation is vastly different from what is known in Ghana. Many say they now value time in view of the fact that everything is based on time. Those working in factories claim they feel overworked at the end of the day, while they seldom felt that way in Ghanaian factories.

Most of the Ashanti immigrants in Toronto belong to several voluntary associations, the commonest being the Ashanti Association with branches in different parts of Toronto. It meets once every month. Though membership in the Ashanti Association is open to all Ashantis, a few told me that for personal reasons they are no longer members. Membership is, ideally, taken of one's own free will without any external compulsion. Among the features of the Ashanti Association is a sense of purpose set out in a document so that those who choose to join are expected to subscribe to the aims of the Association. Some of the aims are:

(1) To weld friendly relationships between all Ashanti immigrants in Toronto.

(2) To settle disputes between members provided such cases are referred to the Association by the disputing members.

(3) To help members who may be in need morally or financially (subject to the approval of the executive members).

(4) To take keen interest in home affairs.

(5) To support other associations (for example, the All-African People's Association) in bringing to light issues of socio-political interest pertaining to Africa.

Ashanti immigrants in Toronto take part in political activities by way of attending political rallies and demonstrations.⁵² The Ashanti Association gives a person a sense of cultural identity and gives considerable help when it comes to funeral celebrations. The existence and functions of the Ashanti Association seem to suggest that, contrary to the thesis of such writers as Colin Turnbull (1963), the Ashanti immigrant in Toronto never walks alone. Far from home and uneasy in strange surroundings, Ashanti immigrants seek the company of their own people and turn to their leaders for advice and settlement of disputes in accordance with their own familiar customs.⁵³ The Ashanti Association gives one a sense of purpose, history, and origin. It is a constant, consoling reminder that one is never alone in one's struggle for existence, however strange and hostile the environment might be. The association gives individuals emotional release from the anxieties and strains of daily experience.

Various social activities, for example, football games, parties, and traditional festivals are organized, mainly during the summer, by the Ashanti Association.

Some Ashantis belonging to various religious sects say they have been greatly helped by these groups to adjust to living conditions in Toronto. For example, an Ashanti told me that

⁵² Several Ashanti immigrants in Toronto claim political refugee status in Canada.

⁵³ See Kenneth Little (1965).

during his first three months in Toronto, he neither paid rent nor bought any clothing, because his church took care of that. Several Ashantis who came to Toronto as refugees say the initial problems of integration were solved for them through the services of Canadian Social Welfare.

Some Ashanti immigrants in Toronto have married Canadians and other nationals and have Canadian children. The majority of the Ashanti immigrants, however, are married to fellow Ashantis. Inculcating Ashanti traditions or culture into the children seems to be a priority for most Ashanti parents, especially when both parents are Ashantis. Ritual, education, food, language, clothing, and traditional music and dance are the main means by which Ashanti parents are striving to keep their children close to their roots. An Ashanti informant told me that the school his children attend organizes an "International Day" once every year, and this enables the children to dress in the traditional Ashanti kente cloth. An Ashanti mother also told me she is invited once a year to her children's school to give a talk on Ashanti customs. However, not all Ashantis in Toronto have children at schools that create a cordial atmosphere for immigrants. I was told by one Ashanti that at the school the child attends a different cultural background is not seen as an advantage. There is no recognition of what the immigrant might experience. Many things that are unfamiliar to the immigrant are given an importance that the immigrant finds difficult to understand. A fifteen-year-old Ashanti immigrant had this to say:

It was hard in the beginning. The kids at school didn't really know me as yet. The first day of school we were all friends together, then after some time they separated and went back into their own friendships again. They started calling me names at first because of my color. It wasn't too much of a shock to me because I've been given hint of such a thing. It doesn't worry me too much. Now they've stopped (Ama, a student).

The daily lives of many Ashanti immigrants in Toronto are a blend of old and new cultures. In one of the houses I visited the blend of old and new cultures was portrayed by a picture I saw of two Ashanti sisters, one in traditional clothes and the other in a miniskirt. Other forms of blending include the preparing of Ashanti dishes mixed with Western ones, and the speaking of English, frequently mixed with the traditional language.

Almost all the Ashantis I interviewed claim they are in constant touch with Ghana. They send money for projects and visit in person once in a while, especially, during funerals. They are kept posted on developments at home through letters and phone calls. To a large extent, migration has not broken the bonds and obligations of kinship obligations among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto.⁵⁴

However, Ashanti immigrants in Toronto have undergone tremendous socialization to the extent of changing the way they look at several issues (in particular, socio-economic issues), yet deep down every Ashanti in Toronto I interviewed has a firmly-rooted love for Ashanti tradition. There is a strong sense among them that to despise traditional Ashanti culture means

⁵⁴ About eighty percent of those I interviewed said so.

ingratitude to their roots. They have an ambition to protect "the national soul of their race" (Rattray 1927:9), because as an informant told me, "we trust that therein lies the sure hope that our children will one day make their own original contributions to knowledge and progress in Canada."

Funeral Rites

Funeral rites among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto represent a mix of Ashanti and Western culture. The Ashanti immigrant community in Toronto has undergone tremendous acculturation due to emigration, but Ashantis still adhere to modifications of old values.

In order to appreciate the mixture of Ashanti and Western culture in funeral rites among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto, it is imperative to know some of the major differences and similarities between the practice of funeral rites among Ashantis in Ghana and Canadian funeral practices. Having already discussed traditional Ashanti and Canadian funeral practices, I will only summarize but not elaborate the similarities and dissimilarities between them.

Canadian funeral practice is generally a quiet affair while it is "un-Ashanti" for funeral celebrations to be quiet affairs. As Nketia (1955:36) points out, the assumption that funeral music should be calm and solemn is definitely un-African, and this is

particularly true in the case of the Ashantis.⁵⁵

Among the Ashantis there is a great show of the deceased's wealth during a funeral celebration.⁵⁶ But among Canadians it would be considered strange for the possessions of a deceased to be on display during the funeral rites. Jessica Mitford (1963), however, observes that there may be a conspicuous display of wealth, which she terms the "status symbol par excellence" in connection with American funeral practices as, I believe, is also the case in Canada. But, the display of wealth during a funeral among Canadians has a different base compared to the case of the Ashantis insofar as it may concern the elaborateness of the coffin and the size of the ceremony. The reason for displaying the possessions of a deceased among the Ashantis during funeral rites is to demonstrate how successful the deceased has been in his or her life time.

The corpse in Canadian funeral practice is washed and dressed by undertakers at the funeral home, while this is not the case among the Ashantis in Ghana. The Ashantis prefer a deceased to be washed and dressed by close kin so that strangers may not see things as, for example, rashes considered as disgraceful among the Ashantis.

The concept and practice of the funeral home as it exists in Canadian funeral practice is unheard of in Ghana, hence

⁵⁵ See Needham (1967) for a detailed account of the connection between percussion and transition.

⁵⁶ During Ashanti funeral rites the possessions of a deceased are displayed, and the corpse is adorned with gold dust.

completely absent from Ashanti funeral practice there. The use that Ashantis make of funeral homes in Toronto illustrates one major area of the blending of cultures.

In both Ashanti and Canadian funeral practice the deceased is honored. In Ashanti funeral practice mourners honor the deceased because he or she is a potential guardian and supporter. Canadians also honor the deceased, but a Canadian informant told me that their ceremonies for the dead are really to help the living. I think Canadians still retain some feelings that the dead will "know" that they are honoring them because of familiar statements such as, "My father would have wanted it that way." "My sister would be pleased if she knew." These statements imply some sort of ambivalence about the ability of the deceased to remain aware of what the still-living are doing for them.

The pouring of libations⁵⁷ during funeral rites is an important feature in Ashanti funeral practice. But, in a case when a deceased happens to be a Christian, prayer in characteristic Christian fashion is also used. Ashanti funeral rites are matters of custom but, because of the long history of Christianity among Ashantis, Christian customs are so deeply involved in Ashanti funeral rites that a strictly non-Christian funeral tends to be a practical impossibility.

Funeral rites among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto are of three types: (1) funeral rites for Ashanti immigrants who die in Canada and are buried in Canada; (2) funeral rites for Ashanti

⁵⁷ See Appendix Five for explanation on libation.

immigrants who die in Canada but have their corpse sent to Ghana for burial; (3) and most commonly, funeral rites for kin who have died in Ghana or elsewhere than in Canada but have rites performed in Toronto.

In all three types the transmission of the news of death is not haphazardly done. The way people are told and the order in which they are told are important. Immediate kin are informed within minutes or hours, usually by phone and telegram and afterwards by letter, with the aim of sending more detailed information to Ghana from Canada or vice-versa.

Sometimes instead of directly reporting a death that has occurred in Canada to kin in Ghana or vice-versa, a message is sent saying that the deceased is seriously ill. The motive behind the evasion is to soften the impact of the news of death by allowing kin to become aware of it more gradually. There is a strong feeling among Ashantis that emotional damage results not from the severity of a loss but from the suddenness with which it comes. It is not suffering which is feared but the shock that the news of death brings, hence the evasion.

As in the traditional Ashanti settings, Ashanti immigrants in Toronto, when announcing the death of a family member, use euphemistic expressions, their voices dropping almost to a whisper. There is not much deviation from the words employed in announcing a death in Ghana. The most common expression is, "[Name of deceased] has departed, or gone out."

It is difficult to say conclusively that the euphemistic

expressions used by Ashanti immigrants in Toronto in reporting the death of kin indicate, as in the case of traditional Ashantis in Ghana, that they believe a person does not merely die but passes on to another life. About ten out of the thirty Ashantis I talked with on the issue were not certain about their personal conception of death. Some wonder whether there is really any life after death.⁵⁸ For example, one interview contained this exchange:

Paul: How about the idea of not reporting death in plain language like you mentioned?

Kofi: To the Ashanti, a person does not die; a deceased just travels back to where he came from.

Paul: Having stayed in Europe and North America for a total of fourteen years, what do you now think about the idea of a deceased person not being considered as dead but staying elsewhere?

Kofi: I don't think this idea is peculiar to the Ashantis. Doesn't it exist in Christianity, Islam, and other religious traditions found in Europe and America?

Paul: My concern here is the degree of faith that the individuals have in life after death beyond what they say and do officially during funeral rites.

Kofi: Well, that is very difficult to say. Personally, I don't know whether or not there is life after death. Perhaps, I am currently more inclined to think life is here and now, and one has to make the best of it before he dies and rots away.

Another informant said that although he had been taught from childhood that after death the okra goes to the supreme being and the sunsum goes to saman (i.e., "the place of the dead"), of which he does not know the geographical location, sometimes in

⁵⁸ See Appendix Six for transcribed tapes of recorded interview.

his solitary moments he wonders whether there is really life after death.

In spite of the superficiality of some Ashantis regarding life after death, virtually all the Ashantis I interviewed expressed knowledge of traditional Ashanti myths and beliefs about death and claimed they still subscribe to them. In practice they try to follow the traditional Ashanti rituals of death insofar as they are known to them.⁵⁹ Yet, it is difficult to know the degree of faith that individuals have in them beyond what they say and do officially during funeral rites.

When an Ashanti dies in Canada, the corpse has to be attended to first by the medical people, who have to certify that the person is dead. The certification is in accordance with the law or norm in Canada, where no one else can certify a person dead. A person is not recognized as being dead until certified as such. Death is a legal issue, and nothing can happen to the deceased until the proper forms are signed. The corpse is tagged by the medical people and then placed in a plastic bag to be picked up by a funeral home representative. Arrangement with a funeral home is made by kin, sometimes in consultation with the

⁵⁹ One of the ways by which Ashantis in Toronto have learned about the traditional Ashanti funeral rituals in Ghana was through the neighborhood evening gatherings of storytelling and play-acting among children as a source of entertainment. It is very common among Ashanti children in Ghana to sit around an old person, who tells them stories in the evening. Among the Ashantis storytelling is an informal way of educating children about the traditional customs. Some of my Ashanti informants in Toronto claim they still tell stories about Ashanti customs to their children.

Ashanti Association.

Meanwhile, obituary posters with a picture of the deceased are made and posted at places in Toronto with large Ghanaian communities such as, for example, the Jane and Finch area. Invitation cards are also printed and sent out to invitees. Names of chief mourners are listed on the invitation cards. Some of the people named as chief mourners are not really related to the deceased. Some qualify as chief mourners by virtue of being on the executive of the Ashanti Association, and sometimes one qualifies as a chief mourner because one has been a very good friend of the deceased. The people named as chief mourners have an influence on the number of people who might attend the rites. On the average about two hundred people attend. Even though some people attend the rites because they know the deceased, the majority of those who attend do so merely because of a chief mourner they know; this is particularly true of funeral rites performed in Toronto for kin who have died in Ghana or in some other place than Canada. Other things stated on the invitation cards are the venue and time for the rites.⁶⁰

When the corpse has been taken to the funeral home, it is washed, embalmed, dressed, and made ready for burial in Canada or to be flown to Ghana for burial. In contrast with the traditional Ashanti system, the washing and dressing are done by undertakers at a funeral home.

If the corpse has to be sent to Ghana from Canada for

⁶⁰ See Appendix Four for a sample of the invitation card.

burial, travel arrangements are quickly made within a day or two of the death. The corpse is accompanied by a few kin. In such a case a day is set by the immediate kin in Toronto for a wake to be held at a rented place or at the funeral home. Normally, the wake is held a night prior to the day on which the corpse is supposed to be flown to Ghana for burial. During the wake the corpse (already washed, embalmed and dressed) is placed in an open casket for all to view. With regard to dressing the corpse, make-up is applied to make the dead look good, and normally a male is dressed in a suit, a female, in a dress. In both cases the hands are folded on the stomach.

The wake, which is typical of traditional Ashanti, is the equivalent of what in Canadian funeral practice is called visitation. The difference is that in Canadian funeral practice the period of visitation is generally for two days and the funeral service is commonly held on the third day following another short period of visitation, but in the Ashanti funeral practice in Toronto (as in Ghana) the period for the wake is commonly one day. In Canadian practice visitation normally occurs in the afternoon and evening from two until five, and seven until nine. But, among Ashantis in Ghana wake-keeping occurs normally at ten in the evening until five the next morning, and this is also the practice among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto.

The first to arrive at the funeral home for the wake are the kin of the deceased and often all the chief mourners. They are

shown by the funeral director to the room where the wake is to be held; the deceased is already dressed and placed in the casket. Then come the sympathizers, who normally greet those present with a hand shake and then go to look at the deceased.

There is considerable show of emotion during the wake, especially in the presence of the deceased. In Toronto holding the wake away from the home puts a constraint on how much grief mourners are willing to express and how they are willing to express it. Periodically, mourners approach the open casket to view the corpse and return to their seats with tears on their face. It is not uncommon to hear Ashanti women at the wake singing the traditional Ashanti funeral dirges just the way they are sung in Ghana. Relatives and friends mingle freely during the wake and viewing of the corpse, and there is considerable sociability. Relatives and friends bring flowers to accompany the deceased to Ghana.

In the morning following the wake a service is held for the deceased, especially if he or she belongs to a particular religious group whose members deem it fitting. After the service libations are poured on behalf of relatives and the Ashanti Association, and blessing is asked from the gods and the ancestors for all those who attend the wake. The ancestors and gods are also requested to grant a safe journey to those who will be accompanying the corpse to Ghana. The corpse is then flown to Ghana for further rites and burial. A day is set for further rites in Toronto, which might be some weeks away or even months

as is also the case in Ghana.

In a case where the corpse is to be buried in Canada, a day and time is agreed upon by kin in consultation with the Ashanti Association if the deceased or a relative of the deceased is a member. Saturday afternoons are normally preferred for the funeral rites, because most people do not work on weekends.

The funeral director advises and directs most things, especially if the people involved are unsure of what to do, until the burial. A short service is held at the funeral home prior to the burial, and at the grave side a libation is poured by an elder (usually an executive member of the Ashanti Association) with words similar to those used in traditional Ashanti setting:

You are leaving us today; we have performed your funeral. Do not let any of us fall ill. Let us get money to pay the expenses of your funeral. Let those who have come to pay you their last respect without legal papers here in Canada obtain one with ease. Life to all of us. Life to the executive members of the Ashanti Association. (Transcribed video tape of an Ashanti funeral held in July, 1990 at Toronto).

After the burial a reception is held. A place is rented for the occasion.⁶¹ The reception usually runs from nine in the evening to one in the morning. The activities during the reception are what most Ashanti immigrants in Toronto consider to be the main funeral rites, because it is during the reception that social activities like dancing, drinking, speeches, gossiping, the giving of donations, etc. take place. The activities are the same for all the three categories of Ashanti

⁶¹ York Community Memorial Hall is one of the common places rented.

funeral rites in Toronto.

For the reception, which some Ashantis call the actual funeral rite, chairs and tables are arranged in two or three rows to form a semi-circle facing a platform on which are the seats for the chief mourners. Behind the platform and sometimes in a corner is stationed a sound system with speakers positioned at the four corners of the hall. The open space within the circle formed by the arrangement of the seats is used for dancing.

Ashantis attending the function try as much as possible to be in the traditional mourning cloth regardless of the weather.⁶² It is not unusual for people named as chief mourners who do not have a traditional mourning cloth to borrow one for the occasion. The traditional Ashanti mourning cloth is black and, in the case of men, it is wrapped around the body under the armpit but over the left shoulder. Traditionally, women just wrap it around their body from under the armpit and covering the breast. Currently, women make fashionable dresses of all kinds out of the mourning cloth for funerals. People attending the funeral rites usually dress very nicely so as to show dignity and respect for the occasion. The men who do not have traditional mourning clothes often wear suits, and the women dress in very fashionable Ashanti mourning clothes made into dresses.

The ceremony unofficially commences with the playing of

⁶² At one of the funeral rites I attended during the winter of 1989, I saw three of the chief mourners come in their winter clothing and later change into the traditional cloth just before the ceremony commenced.

several types of recorded traditional funeral music. This comprises a mixture of what in Ghana is called "high-life," funeral dirges, and Christian hymns sung in Akan.⁶³ The chief mourners are already seated, and as the guests come in they go up and greet the chief mourners with a handshake, starting with the chief mourner seated on the immediate right.⁶⁴

Someone, not necessarily a relative, acts as an officiant or master of ceremonies. With everybody seated the officiant, who is usually a man, in a very formal way so as to mark the official beginning of the ceremony, welcomes everyone. He then briefly reminds those present that, even though everyone might know the purpose of the gathering, Ashanti custom demands that he formally specify the reasons for the gathering. He tells all present about the "passing away" of the deceased and proclaims the well known Ashanti saying that "everyone has to climb the ladder of death." He thereafter reminds everyone of the essence of funeral rites among Ashantis and requests that all present for the funeral rites should act in a way that makes the occasion a very memorable one. The officiant then calls on a person whose name is given to him prior to the commencement of the ceremony to pray. Usually, God is asked to receive the soul of the deceased and

⁶³ Ashanti culture is very dynamic and has adopted some Christian values as illustrated by the playing of recorded Christian hymns in Akan during funeral rites.

⁶⁴ It is an Ashanti custom that in greeting two or more people, one should not start with the person on the left. Refer to section on African background for the significance Ashantis attach to the right and the left.

provide for those the deceased has left behind, especially if he or she was depended upon for shelter, food, or clothing. After the prayer a hymn may be sung in remembrance of the deceased, especially, if the departed was a Christian while alive. Ashanti funeral rites are matters of custom but, because of the long history of syncretism, they are so deeply involved with Christian customs that a genuinely non Christian funeral tends to be a practical impossibility.

Another person, usually an executive member of the Ashanti Association, is called to pour libations. The ancestors are invited to grace the occasion with their presence and bless all present for the occasion. The ancestors are also requested to receive the deceased into their midst, and the deceased is requested not to forget those that he or she has left behind: the dead should open new avenues for the living.

The pouring of libations to the gods and ancestors demonstrates the holy and religious character of the ceremony,⁶⁵ and it strongly projects the traditional personality of Ashanti immigrants in Toronto. It also portrays their sense of dependence on the ancestors and illustrates their claim that they still uphold the traditional Ashanti beliefs and practices.

In one of the video recordings of an Ashanti funeral rites that I have, the person pouring the libations can be seen wearing a suit and therefore unable to bare the chest as custom demands in the rite (see Appendix Five). Here is an example of how

⁶⁵ See Appendix Five for an explanation of why and how.

immigrants have to modify old practices.

If the ceremony is a funeral rite for a dead person who has been buried in Ghana, the video recording of the rite as it was performed there will be played. Sometimes, before the video recording is played, a very brief life history of the deceased will be read by a person named in the program. An unedited example of such a life history read at one of the funerals I attended in Toronto in November, 1989, is as follows:

Benjamin Odoi Darku, popularly called Bobby Grey, was born on 6th June, 1929, at Mampong. His parents were the late Opanyin Kwasi Odoi of Mampong and Mame Akosua Akyeabeah of Mampong.

Ben started schooling at Mampong Methodist School in 1936, but owing to the early death of his parents, his elder sister Adwoa Oyeku brought him and his sister Ama Obenewa to Accra to continue his education. He completed the elementary education in 1947.

He was employed by CFAO as Stores Assistant in 1948 and went through the ranks until he was appointed to Assistant Textiles Manager. In 1956, he met his beautiful and hard-working wife, Miss Elizabeth Adokailey Brown, now Mrs. Elizabeth Darku.

In 1958, he was transferred to Koforidua to revive the collapsed Textiles Department. His job took him round Kwahu and Akim areas and within a short time the CFAO Textiles Department was revived. He was transferred back to Accra in 1962. He later resigned and joined UAC as general goods store-keeper. In 1971, he left UAC to join GNTC at Tema as a Commission Storekeeper until finally retired in 1984.

Early this year, he joined Central Fisheries Company as Director. Ben was blessed with 6 children: 4 boys and 2 girls.

Ben was a good christian and for eight years, he was a session member of the Tema Community 2 Presby Church. He was very proud of his wife, children and nephews. His cousin Newton A. Maafo has lost a great friend, brother and partner as the two had been too close for the past forty years. Ben was a man of society and took

part in the first film shot by Ghana Films - the famous "The Boy Kumasenu."

Ben passed away on Friday, 29th September, 1989 at the Tema General Hospital after a short illness.

The wife, children and family have lost a dear person; Kwabena dua! Lizzy will never forget you the rest of her life.

Rest In Peace.

The reading of the eulogy of a deceased at a funeral enables those in attendance to learn about the person for whom they have gathered to perform the rites.

After the reading of the eulogy of a deceased, background music is played so that the chief mourners will get up and acknowledge the presence of all those who have come for the ceremony. They do this by walking slowly within the space created in the middle by the arrangement of the seats and waving their right hands to the guests. After acknowledging the presence of all the guests, the chief mourners in some cases do an adowa dance;⁶⁶ on occasions when there are no drums they just dance to a recorded "high life" tune.

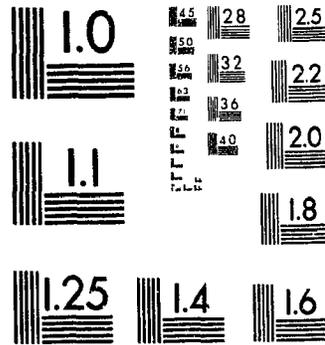
The floor is then declared open for dancing while various drinks are served. There is a lot of beer along with other alcoholic beverages. People generally become tipsy, sometimes even completely drunk. An informant told me that there is a lot of alcoholic consumption because it helps one overcome the sorrow and tears that fill the eyes of those especially close to

⁶⁶ An adowa dance is a popular traditional Ashanti dance full of bodily movements and gestures with various meanings.

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a deceased. May be it also allows the sorrow to be expressed. In other words, drinking does not overcome sorrow so much as evoke it. Those not close to the deceased may also drink because it helps them overcome their sorrow as they tend to remember past deceased relatives because of the present funeral.

Funeral rites among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto create an opportunity for friends who might not have seen each other for quite some time to meet and exchange ideas and gossip. There is considerable sociability. Paradoxically, there is a lot of merry-making at Ashanti funerals in spite of the grief behind the faces of those close to a deceased.

After a considerable period of music, dancing and drinking, tributes to the deceased may be read by one or two people named in the program, and after that local versions of Ghanaian dishes may be served.

The master of ceremonies, after about thirty minutes, announces that the floor is free again for dancing and that there is a person (normally seated opposite the high table) who is collecting gifts to help pay for the expenditure involved in organising the ceremony. While dancing and continuing with the drinking, people take turns in giving gifts to the person collecting them. The gift is normally in the form of money. An Ashanti told me that the amount a person gives normally depends on the drinks and food served at the ceremony. Some people decide on the amount they wish to give well beforehand. At the end of one of the funeral rites I attended in Toronto, I overheard a

person complain that the drinks served were not enough. He seemed unhappy with himself for having given so much money. The names of people giving money to help cover the expenditure for the ceremony are written down together with the amount they have given; the list tends to influence the amount people are willing to give. I was told that the purpose of recording the names of donors and the amount they contributed is to enable the relatives (i.e., the organizers) to send a thank-you card in appreciation of the gift. This is a Western custom and it gives an illustration of the mix of Western and Ashanti culture in funeral rites as performed among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto.

Funeral rites among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto are very well organized and expensive. But the evidence is that people are generous in donating and this helps to pay the entire cost involved in organizing the ceremony. There is the possibility that the organizers may make a profit. Hence there is a temptation for one to term funeral rites among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto a commercialization of funeral practice. The typical cost of an Ashanti funeral in Toronto is about four thousand dollars. As to why it is expensive, and what the money involved is spent for, Kwame, an Ashanti informant, had this to say,

I personally believe that everything that is worth doing, is worth doing well. People attend funeral rites to celebrate and have fun (no matter how strange that might sound to you). You can't invite people only to give them water to drink. Among other things, the success of Ashanti funeral rites here in Toronto is judged by the food and drinks served, music provided, and even the place rented for the occasion; all these involve money. It is the wish, I believe, of every Ashanti to have or be part of a funeral celebration

that can be termed successful or well done; for it to be such, one need not bother too much about the cost involved.

Dancing normally continues until one in the morning when a vote of thanks is given by the master of ceremonies to all those who attended the ceremony, and the ceremony itself is formally pronounced ended.

As an illustration of the above general but brief account, I append a description of one specific funeral. One of the six I attended in Toronto, was that of the late Kwame Darku.

Kwame Darku, a retired store manager, died in Ghana on September 29, 1989, at the age of sixty. He was buried in Ghana, but his two sons, having filed for refugee status in Canada and staying in Toronto, could not attend the funeral rites in Ghana.

News of Darku's death was transmitted through a phone call from Ghana to Opoku, the younger son in Toronto, who was by then preparing to go to work in the morning. Opoku's elder brother, Kofi, with whom he was sharing a three-bedroom apartment, rang from work and was surprised to hear from his wife that Opoku had not gone to work. Kofi requested to speak to Opoku, but Opoku told Kofi's wife to tell him that he was not in the mood to talk. On Kofi's insistence, Opoku came on the line and told Kofi that news had just come from Ghana that their father was very ill.

Opoku's explanation for not telling his elder brother the news about their father's death at the time he phoned was that he wanted to cushion the shock. Opoku's evasion was in accordance

with Ashanti feeling that emotional damage results not from the severity of a loss but from the suddenness with which the news of death comes. As for Opoku, he was so shocked and disorganized at the news of their father's death that he could not go to work that morning.

Kofi kept pondering what his younger brother told him about their father's illness, and by the time he got home, he had become convinced that his father had died. That same evening Kofi and Opoku informed their three cousins in Toronto and the President of the Ashanti Association by phone. The President phoned some of the members of the association while the three cousins passed the news on to other friends. From that point friends told friends, and within two hours the news of Kwame Darku's death had spread widely among relatives and friends in Toronto. Those who heard of the death and were staying close to Kofi and Opoku took the opportunity to visit them that evening.

The following morning, Kojo, a second-cousin of Kofi and Opoku, was informed about the death of Kwame Darku. Kojo immediately rang Kofi and, while expressing grief about the death, told Kofi that he should have called him yesterday to tell him about the death instead of making him learn of it from a "stranger." Kojo reminded Kofi about an important Ashanti custom which demands that the transmission of the news of death should not be haphazardly done. Relatives have the right to know within minutes or hours and expect to be informed in person or over the telephone. Kofi apologized to Kojo and told him the slight was

not intentional.

Kofi and Opoku decided to perform funeral rites in Toronto for their late father. They consulted with their cousins and the executive of the Ashanti Association and decided on Saturday, November 25th, 1989, for the funeral rites.

York Community Memorial Hall was booked in advance and an arrangement with a video-recording firm was made to cover the ceremony. Invitation cards were printed and mailed out to those who mattered. There were ten names listed as chief mourners on the invitation card: Mr. & Mrs. Newton Darku, Mr. & Mrs. Maxwell, Dr. & Mrs. Kojo Lamptey, Mr. & Mrs. Richard Ofori, Mr. & Mrs. Allotey, Mr. & Mrs. Jimmy Apreku, Mr. & Mrs. Yaw Toku, Mr. & Mrs. Kwaku Dua Agyemang, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Mensah and Miss. Stella Asante. About five of the people named as chief mourners were not related to the deceased and had never come into contact with him in his life time. The date (Saturday, November 25, 1989), time (6pm - 1am) and venue (York Community Memorial Hall) for the funeral rites were also stated on the invitation card.

Kofi and Opoku made arrangements, in advance, with six Ashanti women (wives of relatives and friends) in Toronto with regard to Ghanaian dishes (i.e., kenkey and ampesi) to be cooked for the occasion.

On the day of the funeral rites Kofi, Opoku, and about six relatives and friends went to the York Community Memorial Hall in the afternoon and arranged the chairs and tables in three rows to form a semi-circle facing a platform on which were the seats for

the chief mourners. An open space was created within the circle formed by the arrangement of the seats to be used for dancing. The help that Kofi and Opoku received from their Ashanti friends in arranging the seats in the hall to suit the occasion demonstrates a sense of cooperativeness which characterizes Ashantis both in Ghana and in Toronto.

The ceremony unofficially commenced with the playing of recorded traditional funeral music. This comprised a mixture of what in Ghana is called "high-life," funeral dirges and Christian hymns sung in Akan.⁶⁷ The chief mourners (all in traditional Ashanti mourning cloth in spite of the weather) were already seated, and as the guests came in they went up and greeted the chief mourners with a handshake, starting with the chief mourner seated on the immediate right.⁶⁸

An Ashanti was hired for his eloquence to act as an officiant or master of ceremonies. With everybody seated the officiant, who was a man, in a very formal way so as to mark the official beginning of the ceremony, welcomed everyone. He then

⁶⁷ Ashanti culture is very dynamic and has adopted some Christian values as illustrated by the playing of recorded Christian hymns in Akan during funeral rites. Some of the hymns were: Jesus is my life and salvation, No one knows the end of times, Where is the destination of my spirit? From dust was I created and into dust shall I go, If you serve the Lord dutifully you will have a place in paradise, Before the throne of heaven, When will I see the Lord who died for me? We shall sing in praise of the Lord, etc.

⁶⁸ It is an Ashanti custom that in greeting two or more people, one should not start with the person on the left. Refer to section on African background for the significance Ashantis attach to the right and the left.

briefly reminded those present that, even though everyone knew the purpose of the gathering, custom as in Ashanti tradition, demanded that he should formally specify the reasons for the gathering. He told all present about the bereavement of Kofi and Opoku and proclaimed the well known Ashanti saying that "Everyone has to climb the ladder of death." He thereafter reminded everyone of the essence of funeral rites among Ashantis and requested that all present for the funeral rites should act in a way that would make the occasion a very memorable one. Below is a translation of an excerpt of some of the words used by the officiant,

All gathered here this evening, I believe today is a sad day for us all. We all know what death is about. It is something that when one encounters never returns. One day we shall all encounter it in one way or the other; so today our gathering here is to demonstrate to the late Kwame Darku that what he has encountered is not peculiar to him and that by gathering here we are with him to bid him farewell.

The officiant then called on a member of the Ashanti Association, Yaw Owusu, whose name had already been given to him prior to the commencement of the ceremony to pray. In the prayer, God was asked to receive the soul of the deceased and provide for those the deceased had left behind. An excerpt (in translation) of the prayer is,

Almighty father, God of Abraham, creator of heaven and earth. It is you who sent your angels to guard us safely to this place and permitted us to gather here this evening to help Kofi and Opoku perform the customary rites for their late father.

The late Kwame Darku lived for you in all aspects of his life here on earth, and today you have called him out of this life. We beg you not to look so much on his

shortcomings as a mortal being while on earth, but in your mercy open the gates of the kingdom for him. Let him find favor at the place he has gone and permit him to prepare a place there for us so that when our time come we shall also get a place in your kingdom. We commit his wife and children together with all he has left behind into your mighty hands Oh God.

God, you who gives rain and sunshine and provides everything for our living on earth, we plead that for as long as we live on this earth and enjoy all your provisions you'll cause us to obey your laws and conduct ourselves that when one day we depart this life, it will be a good departing and find favor in thy sight.

Oh God of Israel, it is you who gives us water to drink and food to eat; please give those that Kwame Darku has left behind all their needs and let them follow in his example that they may at the end of life be countered worthy also to come into your kingdom. Amen.

After the prayer a hymn ("Abide with me") was sang in remembrance of the deceased, as he was a Christian while alive.

Before calling another person, Boateng, also an executive member of the Ashanti Association, to pour libations, the officiant said,

The bible says we should render to Caesar things that are Caesar's and to God things that are for God. So having rendered to God his lot (i.e., prayer) it is time to render to Caesar things that are Caesar's.

The officiant explained that pouring libations to the gods and ancestors "does not signify opposition to God," because when one deliberately uses water instead of alcohol in a situation that calls for the use of alcohol it will not work. On this note he called for libations to be poured.

In pouring the libations Boateng invited the ancestors to grace the occasion with their presence and bless all present for the occasion. The ancestors were also requested to receive Kwame

Darku into their midst, and the late Kwame Darku was requested not to forget those that he has left behind. A translation of some of the words used by Boateng accompanying the pouring of the libations are:

Today is Saturday, ancestors Saturday!

Great ancestors, gods and goddesses, besides you lot there is no one who can hold and support us. We wholly depend on you. Behind you there is no one who can bless us. You who have invited Kwame Darku, we plead that if the place he has gone is good let him stay well.

Ancestors, we do not call some to neglect some. We are children and we do not know how to speak well; what we hear is what we say. As we pour this drink we ask that you bless us and our children, and all in good relation to us. Keep us from where there is trouble and direct us only to places where we shall have success.

Kwame Darku you who has now been admitted into the place of the ancestors, do not forget your wife, children, grandchildren and all well wishers you have left behind. Your funeral rites which we are performing cost money, and it is only you who can open avenues for the cost incurred to be met. Bless everyone, old and small, not excluding those yet to be born so that we can all say that when you left, you did not leave us in vain only to go and rest selfishly.

We ask for blessing for all those who have gathered here this evening. Help those of us yet to be granted a residence permit to be granted one soon.

A brief life history of Kwame Darku was read by his nephew to enable those in attendance to learn about the person for whom they have gathered to perform the rites.⁶⁹

After the reading of the life history of Kwame Darku, background music was played and the chief mourners got up and acknowledged the presence of all those who had come for the

⁶⁹ Excerpt of life history already cited in general section.

ceremony. They did this by walking slowly within the space created in the middle by the arrangement of the seats and waving their right hands to the guests. After acknowledging the presence of all the guests, the chief mourners did an adowa dance to a recorded adowa tune.

The floor was then declared open for dancing while various drinks were served. There was a lot of beer and other alcoholic beverages. People generally became tipsy and some even completely drunk. There was considerable sociability and friends who had not seen each other for quite some time met and had lots of things to talk and gossip about. There was a lot of merry making in spite of the grief behind the faces of those close to the late Kwame Darku.

After a considerable period of music, dancing, and drinking, a tribute to the late Kwame Darku was read by Opoku on behalf of all the children of the late Kwame Darku as stated in the program. Below is an unedited excerpt of the tribute:

It is with great humility and a deep sense of gratitude that we pay this tribute to the memory of our beloved father Kwame Darku.

We are humbled because as we look back over the years we have realized what our Daddy went through in bringing us up to our present standing. We are overwhelmed by the great sacrifice he and mother made to see us through school, providing us with all the school materials required, not forgetting the birthday presents and the occasional special treats we received when the school report was good. For our Dad no book was too expensive, no distance too great to cover if that meant taking us to school in his old car.

We are grateful to God to have given us such a Daddy who was as patient as he was meticulous. A Daddy who could admonish, encourage and praise with equal zeal.

Throughout all these things, we could discern the concern of a loving father who was desirous that his children should succeed in life.

Our Daddy inspired us with his spirit of Christian service. He would attend to the need of an aged relative; he would go to the aid of a needy friend. He would provide help in diverse ways for those who would but just mention what bothers them. Our Daddy inspired us with his life of piety and his utter reliance on God for guidance in his daily life. He always encouraged us to pray in all things and at all times. He would tell us to have faith in God and to trust Him to grant us all the things we have prayed for.

We give glory to God and praise Him because of the peaceful manner in which our Daddy was received into glory as an eloquent testimony to us that he was indeed a humble servant of God.

Our Daddy sleeps in the Lord, and we leave him sleeping peacefully there to wake up on the Day of Resurrection.
Daddy sleep and Rest In Peace!

After the reading of the tribute by Opoku, local versions of Ghanaian dishes (i.e., ampesi and kenkey) were served. The master of ceremonies, after about thirty minutes of eating, announced that the floor was free again for dancing and that there was a person seated opposite the high table who was collecting gifts to help pay for the expenditure involved in organising the ceremony. While dancing and continuing with the drinking, people took turns in giving gifts to the person collecting them. The gifts were in the form of money. The names of people giving money to help cover the expenditure for the ceremony were written down together with the amount they gave. The purpose of recording the names of donors and the amount they contributed was to enable Opoku and Kofi to send thank-you cards in appreciation of the money donated.

Dancing continued till one in the morning when a vote of thanks was given by the master of ceremonies to all those who attended the ceremony. A translation of his words are:

We have come to the end of all the necessary activities. On behalf of Kwame Darku and family I wish to express gratitude for the lovely manner by which things have been done. It is our hope that next time you are called upon, you will all be able to come again. In the morning when you hear the birds singing remember it is us saying a big thank you. Thank you all for coming.

With these words the ceremony was formally pronounced at an end.

Property and Inheritance

Closely associated with Ashanti funeral rites is the subject of property and inheritance. The subject of property and inheritance is so connected with funeral rites that any discussion of one without the other, especially among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto, is incomplete.

About ten Ashanti informants in Toronto and an Ashanti professor at Wilfrid Laurier University who has been in Canada since 1972 (and stayed in Toronto for several years) mentioned many instances when some Ashantis in Toronto travelled to Ghana purposely for the funeral rites of a relative because inheritance of property was involved. They also mentioned instances when other Ashantis in Toronto refused to travel to Ghana for the funeral rites of very close kin because there was no property to be inherited. Some evidence then exists to suggest that some Ashantis who perform funeral rites in Toronto for relatives who have died in Ghana do so because for one reason or the other

there is property to be inherited.

According to Jack Goody (1962), in sociological as in legal writings the term "property" has been applied to both the material objects said to be owned as well as to rights held in such objects. A yet wider usage appears in some anthropological writings. Lowie (1928), for example, employs the phrase "incorporeal property" to cover any assets that have exchange value, including rights in magical formulae that are the subject of market transactions. Goody (1962:285) points out the importance of drawing a distinction between material objects and property, between land and land tenure. He says unless the distinction is drawn, it is difficult for one to appreciate the variety of interests involved. It is not my intention to examine issues in economic anthropology in depth,⁷⁰ but, simply put, among Ashantis a person without social relationships is a person without a chance of inheriting property. One of the ways by which an Ashanti in Toronto proves or reasserts his or her social relationship is by the performance of funeral rites for a dead relative.

Among the Ashantis a distinction is made between ancestral and self-acquired property. According to Rattray (1929:330) there are in fact three main divisions into which property, movable or immovable, might fall: stool property, family property, and

⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion of property as an analytic concept for comparative studies, see Jack Goody (1962).

private property.⁷¹ The classification is not settled on the basis of the nature of the property, but on the basis of its origin. Of the three categories, it is the third (i.e., private property) that is of importance for Ashantis in Toronto. For anything to constitute private property, it must have been acquired by its owner's unaided efforts. Private property might consist of anything purchased with individually earned money. Private property among Ashantis in Ghana and in Toronto is subject to restrictions on alienation, and only loosely correspond to anything in Western law.⁷²

In the past when an Ashanti died, everything (with the exception some times to the deceased's wishes) that a deceased possessed went to the abusua hene ("head of the family").⁷³ After taking what he wanted, the abusua hene handed over the remainder to the next of kin (Rattray 1929:333). Such inherited property did not become the next of kin's own private property any more than that kept by the abusua hene became his own. Both had control over it and used of it during their lifetimes but could not dispose of or alienate it without the full consent of all

⁷¹ See Rattray (1923) for a detailed explanation of these classification.

⁷² It is presumably subject to Canadian and modern Ghanaian law. About ten out of the fifteen Ashantis I talked to about the issue of inheritance were completely ignorant of Canadian and Ghanaian laws of inheritance. All they know is the traditional Ashanti mode of inheritance.

⁷³ Bear in mind the matrilineal system of the Ashantis, since it is very important and determines who gets what from a particular deceased.

concerned. According to Rattray (1929) over time the legal heir (the next of kin), not the head of a family, began to inherit property as a right.

Currently, among Ashantis both in Toronto and in Ghana, a brother rather than a possible uncle or nephew inherits a deceased male's private property. A common Ashanti saying goes, "A nephew or uncle does not succeed provided there are brothers." An Ashanti informant said it is a common practice for Ashantis in Toronto to travel to Ghana for funeral rites of a deceased brother and subsequently to inherit the property left behind.

Like a living person a dead one could own property. A deceased's property could be handed over to an heir, but if the heir did not look after it well, Ashantis believed that the saman ("ghost") of the deceased could make the heir sick. The latter belief is still very strong among Ashantis in Toronto.

Ashantis in Toronto (as in Ghana) can dispose of their private property as they wish during their lifetime. They might sell it, give it away as a gift, or will it without infringing any customary law. The conveyance might take effect either during the owner's lifetime or after death. Moreover, the person to whom it is being alienated might be some one outside the abusua. In theory, the above is the custom both among Ashantis in Ghana and in Toronto. In practice, however, several circumstances tend to restrict the free operation of several other forms of alienation. Under the conditions in which the owner of such private property

lives, almost completely surrounded by family members, the opportunities or inducements to dispose of private property to complete strangers are very infrequent if not non-existent. The influences constantly at work to prevent a person from giving out private property are very strong. For example, a deceased's possessions have to be displayed during his or her funeral rites, both in Toronto and in Ghana, to show how successful he or she has been in life. In the majority of cases among Ashantis in Toronto as in Ghana, therefore, a person's private property remains and on death devolves upon next of kin.

It is now not uncommon for Ashanti fathers both in Ghana and in Toronto to leave at least a part of their private possessions to their children by a will to be acted upon after their death. An Ashanti informant told me he organized funeral rites in Toronto for his father simply in appreciation of his father's willing part of his private possessions (which could have otherwise gone the father's abusua) to him.

A man's abusua does not encourage him to give all his private possessions to his children, either as a gift during his own lifetime or by a will in force after his death. An Ashanti father in Toronto is always reminded by his abusua that when he dies, his children will go to their own abusua and carry such property with them. He is also reminded that it is upon his own abusua that the expenses of his funeral rites fall; that they alone are held responsible for the settlement of any debts which he might leave behind; and that if his own possessions were not

sufficient, they would even have to raise their own money to meet his liabilities.

In spite of the above, many Ashanti fathers in Toronto either give a portion of their privately acquired property to their children or will it to them after death. The latter procedure is a clearly recognized legal traditional practice among the Ashantis both in Ghana and in Toronto; it is known as samansie, which literally means "that which is set aside by the ghost."

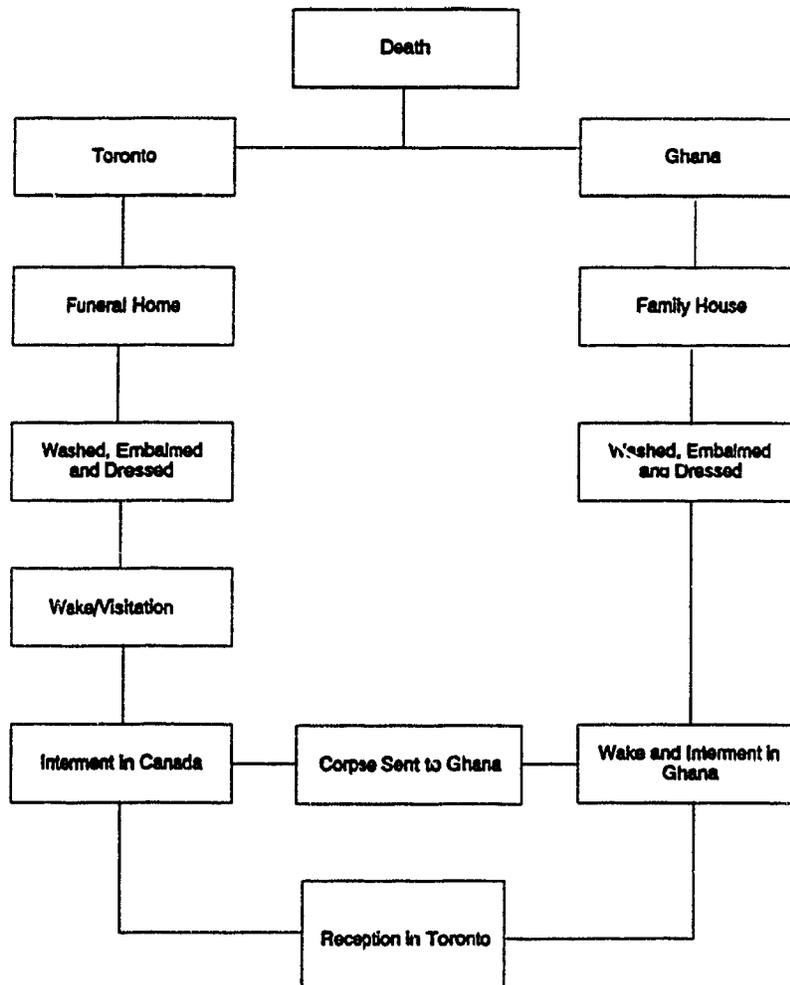
A deceased's wishes concerning property are generally, but not always, carried out. The sanction which mostly influenced the executors in carrying out the wishes of the testator was the fear of a deceased's saman. However, the carrying out of a deceased's wishes concerning property is sometimes subject to claims of equity. An Ashanti legal maxim says, "When a ghost has made an improper distribution of his private property, the living will make a new one."

Not surprisingly there are always tensions and conflicts over transmission of a deceased's private property after the funeral rites, and Ashanti immigrants in Toronto cannot be said to be free of this issue. In a recorded interview with an Ashanti informant in Toronto he told me that in most cases the property of Ashanti immigrants who die and are buried in Toronto have to be accounted for and inherited according to traditional Ashanti custom.

Conclusion

My present study is mainly descriptive,⁷⁴ so it is essential to summarize both what I have described and the comparative context in which I have set it. Chart A, "Phases of Toronto Ashanti Funeral Rites," outlines the basic features of a rite.

A. Phases of Toronto Ashanti Funeral Rites



⁷⁴ For my doctoral dissertation I hope to do a theoretical analysis of this data and compare it with another ritual exported to Canada.

Depending on where death occurs, the corpse is sent to the funeral home if the death occurs in Toronto or to the family house if the death occurs in Ghana.

At a Canadian funeral home a corpse is washed, embalmed, and nicely dressed. In Ghana it is at the family house that the corpse is washed, embalmed, and dressed.

The next stage is the wake/visitation at the funeral home in the case of death at Toronto. In most cases the corpse is then sent to Ghana for a wake and interment. A few are buried in Canada.

Regardless of where interment takes place, a day is fixed for a reception to be held in Toronto.

Culture is dynamic, and Toronto Ashanti culture as represented by funeral rites is no exception. Percy Cohen (1979:203) mentions among other theories of social change, cultural interaction theory. According to cultural interaction theory, when two cultures interact, there is a tendency for cultural change to occur or for an acceleration of cultural change to occur. The main reason for the change, according to Cohen, is that there is an increase in the number of cultural items available, and this leads to the possibility of new combinations.

By exporting traditional Ashanti culture, Ashanti immigrants in Toronto have created an atmosphere for two cultures to interact. Ashanti culture has incorporated several Western elements. However, contrary to the main reason that Percy Cohen

cites, the introduction of Western elements into the funeral rites of Ashantis in Toronto does not only occur because there is an increase in the number of cultural items available to them. It is the lack of certain traditional elements that has led Ashanti immigrants to introduce innovations. For example, the renting of York Memorial Hall for funeral rites is simply because Ashantis lack the traditional setting where funeral rites are performed, big family houses with large compounds and surroundings that can accommodate about two hundred people.

The use that Ashantis make of the funeral homes in Toronto is an innovation. Funeral homes are an important part of two out of the three types of funeral rites among Ashantis in Toronto. The lack of time in Toronto make Ashantis depend on the funeral homes. Moreover, the surroundings in Toronto makes it difficult for Ashantis to obey all the traditional ritual dictates with regard to, for example, the washing of the corpse at the family house by family members. The immigrants, therefore, utilize the procedures of the funeral homes as a substitute serving the aims of the ritual process with regard to washing, embalming, and dressing of the corpse.

Chart B is a summary comparison of funerals in four contexts: (1) traditional Ghana (as represented in classic texts such as those of Rattray and others); (2) contemporary Ghana; (3) contemporary Canada; and (4) Toronto Ashantis.

B. Comparison of Funerals: A Summary

GHANA TRADITIONAL	GHANA CONTEMPORARY	CANADA	TORONTO ASHANTIS
Very strict about the use of euphemistic expression in reporting death. Failure to do so is a capital offense.	Euphemistic expressions used in reporting death (very elaborate)	Euphemistic expressions used in reporting death (not elaborate)	Euphemistic expressions used in reporting death (elaborate)
Corpse washed, embalmed traditionally with herbs, and dressed at family house	Corpse washed, embalmed, and nicely dressed at family house	Corpse washed, embalmed, and nicely dressed at funeral home	In case of death in Toronto, corpse washed, embalmed, and nicely dressed at funeral home
Corpse adorned with valuables	Corpse adorned with valuables (mostly gold)	Corpse not adorned with valuables	Corpse sometimes adorned with valuables
Corpse laid on bed in family house where wake is held	Corpse laid on bed in family house where wake is held	Corpse laid in open casket at funeral home where visitation takes place	Corpse laid in open casket at funeral home where wake is held
No strict time limit for wake. Use of professional mourners	Wake commonly for 1 night. No professional mourners	Visitation for 2 or 3 days. No professional mourners	Wake commonly for 1 night. No professional mourners
Traditional mourning cloth (mainly red and black)	Traditional mourning cloth (mainly black)	No traditional mourning cloth	Traditional mourning cloth (mainly black)
Strict fasting rules during funerals	Fasting during funerals. However, certain Ghanaian dishes, for example, <u>ampesi</u> and <u>kenkey</u> , allowed to be eaten	No fasting	No strict fasting rule. Ghanaian dishes such as <u>ampesi</u> and <u>kenkey</u> commonly served
Strong belief in ancestors linked to funeral rites	Strong belief in ancestors linked to funeral rites	No belief in ancestors	Belief in ancestors linked to rites
Pouring of libations to the ancestors who receive the deceased and grant material blessings to the living	Pouring of libations	No pouring of libations	Pouring of libations

GHANA TRADITIONAL	GHANA CONTEMPORARY	CANADA	TORONTO ASHANTIS
Very noisy funerals: wailing, singing, drumming, and dancing. Reception is part of the funeral rites	Noisy funerals: much music and dancing. Reception is part of the funeral rites	Quiet funerals. Funeral is separate from the reception	Noisy funerals: much music and dancing. Reception is part of the funeral rites
Strictly earth burial, no cremation	Earth burial, no cremation	Earth burial, sometimes cremation	Earth burial, no cremation
Corpse buried with many materials believed to be needed in the next world	Corpse buried with materials believed to be needed in next world	Corpse buried without materials	Corpse buried with materials (not as elaborate as in Ghana)
Complete shaving of hair	Pays fee in lieu of shaving	No shaving	No shaving
Exhibition of deceased's property and alienation through Ashanti inheritance customs	Exhibition of deceased's property and alienation through Ashanti custom and Ghanaian laws governing property and inheritance	No exhibition of deceased's property. Alienation through Canadian laws governing property	Exhibition of deceased's property, in particular when corpse and property of deceased are sent to Ghana. Alienation through custom and either Ghanaian or Canadian laws governing property, depending on where property is at the time of alienation

The Western elements introduced into Ashanti funeral rites cannot be said to be extremely radical and therefore entirely different from the rites in Ghana. Furthermore, those in Ghana have themselves altered partly because of westernization, but the distinctive features still remain. Funeral rites among Ashantis involve belief in ancestors, and this is the strongest or most fundamental element in them. None of the Western elements introduced into Ashanti funeral rites as practiced in Toronto or in Ghana has displaced the fundamental belief of the Ashantis in ancestors. At best, I think, the Western elements introduced into Ashanti funeral rites both in Ghana and in Toronto are means of helping to venerate the ancestors in a more splendid way.

Durkheim (1965) spent much of his time investigating the complexity of collectively held beliefs and concepts, and exploring how such collective representations unite individuals. Funeral rites among Ashanti immigrants in Toronto illustrate his claim. They confirm his theory, which focuses on the integration of individuals into communal life and the individual's identification with society. The most important factor in social relationships pertaining to Toronto Ashantis is attendance at ceremonies, especially funeral rites. As soon as a death occurs, messages are sent to all concerned. If someone is overlooked, the person invariably becomes angry. On the other hand, should a person receive the message and then deliberately not attend, the act is considered a serious breach of social relationships. Funeral rites create an opportunity for relatives and friends to

come together. The traditional mourning clothes, dances, dishes, music, the adowa, and other customs serve as a reminder of their common identity. These customs help them transcend the autonomy of individualism (which is characteristic of life in Toronto) through the use of language and symbols. It often happens that the pleasure of the reunion of family and friends bubbles up and almost eclipses the grief.

Van Gennep (1960) argues that in all societies change that could be thought of as a passage from one state to another is ritualized. He mentions changes in the phases of the moon or in the seasons, changes in the social status of individuals, the movement of a community to a new village, the entry of a couple into a new house or even entering or leaving a house. He points out that human beings do not become automatic members of a society by virtue of being born but have to be formally accepted into it. Van Gennep uses "rites de passage" to refer to ceremonies that accompany changes associated with life, birth, puberty, marriage, and death as well as changes in the phases of moon and seasons. Modern anthropologists, however, have used the term to apply to the critical moments of human life. Terms like "transition rituals" or "life-crisis rituals" are now employed thus limiting the phrase to a narrower field. My immediate concern with Van Gennep's thesis relates specifically to funeral rites among Ashantis in Toronto. Van Gennep's thesis is, in part, that all rituals involving passage from one state to another share in a tripartite structure defined by the necessary function

of separation from one status and reincorporation into the new one, with a marginal or liminal period in between. Funeral rites among Ashantis in Toronto (as in Ghana) illustrate Van Gennep's thesis. Ashantis believe that until the rites are performed the sunsum of a deceased is homeless and therefore the object of dread. Unable to enter asamado, the sunsum may lead a pitiful existence on the fringe of human habitation. As an Ashanti informant told me, the performance of the funeral rites terminates the miserable period when the sunsum is homeless by honoring the deceased, asking the ancestors to receive the sunsum, confirming the sunsum's arrival in the land of ancestors, and marking the reestablishment of normal relations among the survivors. In line with Van Gennep's thesis, therefore, Ashantis in Toronto (as in Ghana) believe that a deceased does not become an automatic member of asamado (i.e., the land of ancestors) by virtue of being dead. The deceased must be formally separated from the society of the living and formally accepted by the ancestors into asamado through the performance of funeral rites.

Funeral rites are very important to Ashantis and will continue to be so for those in Toronto. There is an element of dynamic blending in Ashanti funeral rites as performed in Toronto. They reflect changing cultural realities and take on distinctive flavors relating to ethnicity, the influence of Canadian funeral practices, and a whole range of other factors. Ashanti funeral rites in Toronto allow for considerable personal innovations, while at the same time they represent one of the

most conservative features, preserving in themselves the fundamental belief in ancestors and forms of material culture such as funeral attire and practices like the pouring of libations, singing of dirges, and alienation of property through the traditional mode of inheritance.

APPENDIX ONE

ASHANTI FUNERAL DIRGES

Below are quotations from Nketia (1955,1969) of some of the verbal expressions in Ashanti funeral dirges. They are selections from the dirges of various lineages/clans and ntoro groups.

1.

Descendant of the Parrot and member of the Anana clan,
It is he that eats palm nuts on the tree and causes
some to fall on the ground,
For other people to gather up and eat.
Is not the wayside bunch of palm nuts that someone
has cut away?

2.

Mother Aba, the great Breast that children suck,
Mother Aba, the great wooden Food Bowl around
which children gather,
Mother Aba, the great Breast that children suck,
Mother Aba, the great wooden Food Bowl around
which children gather,
Mother, you know that when people confer together
privately behind a house,
They do so with people of their own flesh and blood.
Mother, you know our plight;
Don't go too far away from us.

3.

Valiant Owusu,
The stranger on whom the citizen of the town depends,
Father, allow my children and me to depend on you,
So that we may all of us get something to eat,
Father on whom I wholly depend.

When Father sees me, he will hardly recognise me.
He will meet me carrying an old torn mat and a horde
of flies.

Father with whom I confer,
My children and I will look to you,
Father on whom I wholly depend.

Killer-of-hunger,
My saviour,
Father the slender arm full of kindness,
Father the Rover whose footprints are on all paths.

4.

Your grandmother is Amoaa Awisi,
The woman who had many children but reared those of
others as well.
It is Amoaa that hails from Hwerebe Akwasiase,
Awisi's grandchild hails from Anitibanso,
Where skulls are used in the Apirede dance.

5.

When Okani dies, the people of Dwaben are pleased.
When Okani is alive, the people of Dwaben do not like it.
Okani Nkwamfo Agyan Seewaa of Dwaben;
Okani Nkwamfo whose death caused a great stir in the
remote places of Dwaben.
Mother Buruwaa,
When you reach the outskirts of the town,
Mention your name so that strong men may carry you,
For you know that you come from Akoturokomu.

6.

The Boar's grandchild that drinks from Dwadesua waterhole.
Amma Dwamu who hails from Dinkyin,
Mother, the fruitful woman,
Mother has died and left me behind:
With whom am I now here?

7.

We are members of the household of Abokyi.
We are doing what we can but in vain.
Let someone come to us now and again.
When someone is coming, send us Help:
Help sought for in vain!

8.

Atwea Yaa, the flint arrived too late.
Sakrabutu, he is neither an upturner, nor one who moves
about.
You will find him crouching by the wayside.
If you ask him for anything, he gives it to you,
And says, Vanquish the thousand and the mighty with it.
Then you reply, I will not use it for that purpose,
But will use it for something greater:
Deception and the worst strategem,
The portion of the exterior of the pot that skin does not
cover.
Grandchild of Atwea Yaa that hails from the town of Atwea
Gyampon.

9.

The mighty god with three bullets in its head,
Kofi Dankyi and the noblemen of Okwawu.
Asamo Kwadwo and the noblemen of Okwawu.
The death of a nobleman causes great stir.

When the vanguard is lost, the chief's grandchildren
are queried.

When a nobleman gets lost, the drums, resound.
My Lord, I have what you gave me in my right hand;
I am not being discourteous when I extend to you
my left.

10.

I do not mean Adwoa Amoanimmaa of Kumase.
Nor do I mean Adwoa Amoanimmaa of Bekwae.
I mean Adwoa Amoanimmaa of Adanse,
The wise woman that cut her finger in order
to get a husband.

Maafo Maafo Otwerefoo,
Adwoa Amoanimmaa's grandchild who hails from
Yenkyemaduakotene in Adanse.
Ankoma, the Buffalo,
Send me something when someone is coming this way.
Father,
You and I exchange gifts.
(Nketia 1955,1969).

These sample funeral dirges illustrate the kinds of
conventional expressions surrounding death. Nketia (1969:10) says
the dirge is not intended for dancing. Nevertheless, movement in
conjunction with the verbal processes and punctuations of silence
is not unexpected.

The singing of a funeral dirge is done by women, and a good
singer greatly moves her audience emotionally. One of the
requirements of a performer is that she should really feel the
pathos of the occasion and the sentiments embodied in the dirge.
Pretence is condemned, and mock-sadness is discouraged, yet a
tear should fall, lest one be branded a witch or a callous
person. If a tear is physiologically difficult to shed, one must
induce it by some means; but if it is physiologically impossible,
it would be better to have the marks of tears on your face than
nothing at all. These obligatory tears correspond with the

statement made by Huntington and Metcalf (1979:24) that in many societies crying at funerals is not merely tolerated, but is required by custom. An early attempt at understanding the custom of ceremonial weeping was made by Radcliffe-Brown (1964), who based his analysis and theory of society on the ritual expression of sentiments.

The animals referred to in the dirges are totems. Among the Ashantis clans and ntoro groups are believed to have special relationships with various animals. These relationships are expressed in myths in which the first ancestor and the totem animal were associated in some miraculous way. The totems are believed to be related to the historical circumstances of the clan.

Though members of a clan may see themselves as descendants of a particular animal, as stated of the Anana clan in the first quoted dirge, according to most Ashanti scholars the animal's relationship to the clan is primarily symbolic. Most of the clans have their totemic emblems carved on lineage staffs. One can easily identify a particular clan by its emblem, the parrot, the leopard, etc.

Amponsah (1977:50) lists some of the clans in Ashanti with their totems and symbolic meanings as follows:

<u>Clans</u>	<u>Totem</u>	<u>Symbolic Meaning</u>
Anana and Agona	Parrot	Eloquence, Persuasiveness
Ayoko (Oyoko)	Falcon	Patience
Aduana	Dog	Adroitness, Skill

Aberade and Beretuo	Leopard	Aggressiveness
Asona	Crow	Cunning
Konna	Buffalo	Conscientiousness
Asine	Bat	Diplomacy

A totem is a symbol of the unity of a clan; it conveys a feeling of belonging. References to totems in dirges during funeral rites are common.

Ancestors are frequently referred to in the dirges because ancestry and the tracing of descent and affiliations have a significant meaning for the Ashantis. This meaning is embodied in the dual system of clan and ntoro by means of which an individual is identified in varying degrees with his maternal and paternal kin. As illustrated in the sample texts, there is for each clan, and in particular for the lineages within it, a set of dirges, each of which may contain a reference to someone who might have been a common ancestor/ancestress; hence nearly every dirge would be found to contain some personal names. When a person dies, therefore, a portion of the dirges to be sung is predetermined by the clan or lineage to which the deceased belongs. In the dirge the members of a clan are reminded of their links with one another in spite of dispersals which war and several factors might have brought about (Nketia 1969:21).

As can be seen from the sample dirges, an ancestor's contribution to the corporate life of the group or any deed or acquisition he was noted for, or an event, or saying associated with him may be mentioned briefly. Anything about an ancestor's

life and character that is worth noting would be stated or alluded to. According to Nketia (1969:23), in a dirge, mourners may address an ancestor in the same way as they may address a deceased. An ancestor's accomplishment, whatever it might have been, would receive mention in the dirge. Bravery, determination, courage and skill in war are emulated by the Ashantis, and an ancestor who had these earned a tribute in the dirges of the lineage. In the sample dirges cited for example, Owusu's determination and exploits are alluded to and he is described as a "killer of hunger" and a savior; Aba is presented as a person full of kindness and begged not to go "too far away." On the other hand the liberal qualities of an ancestor, i.e., wisdom, wealth or, in the case of women, fecundity are not overlooked; for example, in the fourth sample dirge cited, Amoa Awisi is described as a woman who had many children but reared those of others as well.

The point in mentioning an ancestor's fine deeds is to enhance the respect and pride of the lineage; as Nketia (1969:24) notes, to say that one is the grandchild of such an ancestor would be saying a great deal. With regard to the deceased, the funeral occasion is the last time of been told, in the dirge, of a deceased's ancestors and origin so that it might be easy to find the way to them in the underworld (Nketia 1969:25).

From the point of view of lineages, the theme of the ancestors in the funeral dirge emphasizes that the members are a

people who possess a tradition or history of which they could be proud. Hence lineage sentiments are aroused in the dirge, sentiments which bind the living and the dead together in fellowship, sentiments which give meaning and emotional depth to the dirges which are otherwise, in the main, catalogues of names and deeds.

The focal point of dirges is the deceased who may be identified with as many ancestors as the mourner can recall. Dirges may also call upon the deceased or dwell on the deceased as an individual.

There is also a theme of domicile in Ashanti funeral dirges. For example, in the fourth dirge cited, Amoaa is reminded that he hails from Hwerebe Akwasiase, and in the fifth dirge cited, "Mother" Buruwaa is reminded that she comes from Akoturokomu. In the theme of domicile, one can see the importance of the sentiment of "place" in the life of the Ashanti. The Ashantis have a very strong attachment to their places of domicile because of the ties of kinship and the sentiments that grow out of an association with a locality through the events of history.

The desire of old Ashantis is to live and die where their lineage ancestors also lived and died. They would like to be buried beside their ancestors, and to go where they have gone; to them, their home is where their ancestors lived. When an old Ashanti dies, therefore, he/she would like to be associated not only with the names and deeds of the ancestors, but also with their home which marks them out in history from other people.

Ashanti youths whose feeling towards the ancestors are not so strong as compared to the aged, are nevertheless attached to the locality in which the members of the lineage have settled; they hardly ever settle completely anywhere else. No matter how long they stay at another place, they are likely to continue thinking of themselves as belonging elsewhere. Even when employment takes them away to distant places, they have a strong inclination to go back at intervals to the original place of domicile. They would be expected to attend funerals of members of the lineage, and when they die, their relations would regard it as their duty to have them buried in their original place of domicile; this explains why Ashantis who die in Canada, and elsewhere, have their corpse sent to Ghana for burial.

The theme of domicile is considered worth incorporating in the dirge because both the individual and the group are attached to the village or town in which the lineage ancestors as well as the living members of the lineage live.

Nketia (1969:42) gives other reasons why places of domicile are mentioned in the dirges. Firstly, it clarifies the identity of the deceased individual and helps to distinguish both the deceased and their lineage from other individuals and clans. The name of a deceased, ancestors and their attributes gives a deceased a measure of identity which is carried still further by the inclusion of the place of domicile. Secondly, in the theme of domicile, an ancestor, the deceased and the bereaved individual are linked together by their common habitat or origin. The bond

between them is strengthened by the reference to their common habitat.

Furthermore, Nketia (1969:43) says there may be reasons of prestige for including the theme of the domicile in the dirge. He suggests that the deceased and the living relations may be proud of belonging to a particular historic place, for example, Dankyira which was at one time a powerful and politically advanced state, or Adanse where the Creator is believed to have first created things, or Anitibanso "where skulls are used in the Apirede dance" (fourth cited dirge).

However insignificant the habitat or places of origin may be to others, to a mourner and the members of the lineage they are milestones in traditional history and, therefore, important.

Another important component of Ashanti funeral dirges are the body of expressions portraying the mourners' reaction or attitude to the event of death and to the loss of the deceased (Nketia 1969:44). Reflections on one's own plight, messages and utterances to a deceased as well as to the living may be incorporated. According to Nketia there are traditional expressions for the utterances, but there is scope for originality of sentiment and expression.

The sorrow of parting finds expression in the dirge. The mourners wish is that they should not be left behind or left alone. For example, in the sixth dirge, there is a statement, "Mother has died and left me behind: with whom am I here?" As Nketia (1969:45) points out a mourner knows, of course, that the

rest of the kin are there and that, as the Ashanti maxim goes: "If a father has died, there is another father still living." Yet the hard fact that no one can really be a perfect substitute for one's father, mother, husband or wife, brother, sister or best friend compels a mourner who is close to a deceased to utter words of sorrow or despair, to stress loneliness and bereavement even to the point of offending friends and kin who would like to be considered as of some value in the situation created by death.

Mourners frequently like to include in the dirge expressions calculated to portray the feeling and the thought that the living kin of a deceased would be worse off on account of the departure of one of their number; they would suffer privations. In so doing, a deceased is portrayed as a person who had a contribution to make to the life of the group and lives of particular individuals. This sentiment is conveyed in figurative or plain language, in original or conventional forms. For example, in the second part of the third dirge cited, there is the statement, "When father sees me, he will hardly recognise me. He will meet me carrying an old torn mat and a horde of flies." In other words, as a result of the father's death, all that the mourner in question now possesses is an old torn sleeping mat.

The choice of expression in an Ashanti funeral dirge depends on the relationship of a mourner to a deceased, and on the circumstances of the death of a deceased.

APPENDIX TWO

SAMPLE OF AN OBITUARY NOTICE

OBITUARY

Ebusuapanin Kwame Kyere, Opatin Kwabena Ntse, Kwadjo Obuobi Kwabena Odoi, Opanin Makleyias, the Entire Aterim Family of Mampong-Akwapim, Adifa-ase Dzahena I and the Entire Broad Family of Odoi regret to announce the death of their beloved



Benjamin Odoi DARKU

(also BOBBY GREY)

AGED 60

*which occurred on Friday 29th September
1989 at the Tema General Hospital*

CHILDREN: Grace Odoi Darku (Kumasi), Evelyn Odoi Darku (Teacher), Newton Odoi Darku (Canada), Robert Odoi Darku (GPHA, Tema), Alex Odoi Darku (Canada), George Odoi Darku (Formerly of GPHA, Tema), Sylvia Odoi Darku (Mantaiman Girls Secondary School)
SISTERS: Ama Obumawa, Adwaa Oyeka GRANDCHILD: Karyn Keedy WIDOW: Mrs. Elizabeth A. Darku

Wake-Keeping

Friday 13th October 1989

at Prince of Peace Presbyterian Church Community 2, Tema
from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. then the body will be conveyed to
Mampong-Akwapim at House No. M/W 135
for further Wake-keeping till daybreak

Burial and Memorial Service

Saturday 14th October 1989

at the Mampong-Akwapim Presbyterian Church, thence to the
Presbyterian Cemetery for Burial, thereafter to
House No. M/W 135 Mampong-Akwapim
for Family Gathering

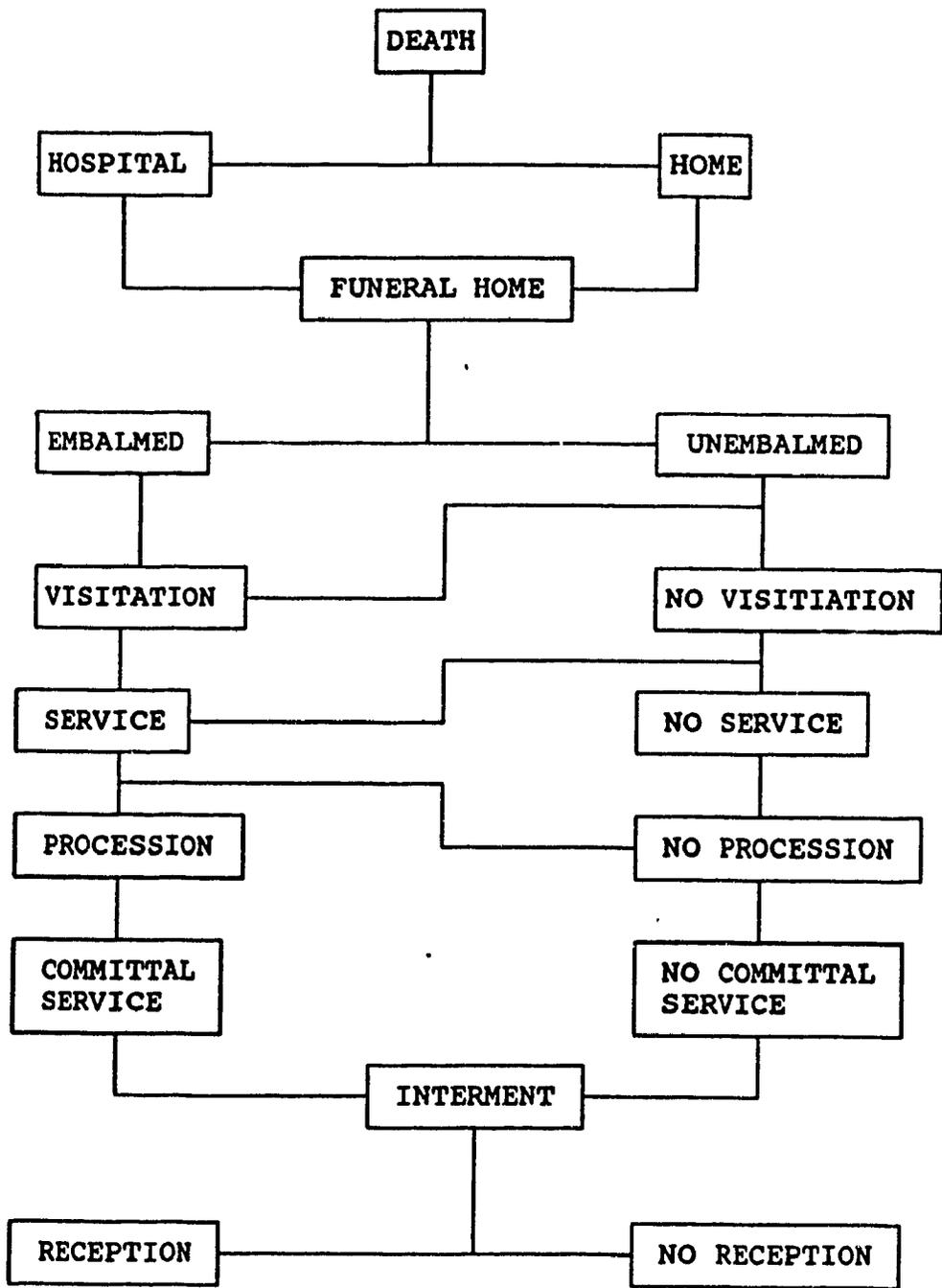
Chief Mourners

*Ebusuapanin Kwame Kyere, Newton A. Mills (Notan Company), Djan (Point de Kaiser, Tema), Anfate Malua I
and entire Broad family of Odoi*

All friends and sympathizers are cordially invited

APPENDIX THREE

CHART SHOWING STAGES IN CANADIAN FUNERAL⁷⁵



⁷⁵ Juschka (1990:71).

APPENDIX FOUR

SAMPLE OF FUNERAL INVITATION CARD

FUNERAL ANNOUNCEMENT.



The Final Funeral Ceremony
for the late

BENJAMIN ODOI DARKU

Will Be Held
On

DATE : Saturday, November 25th, 1989
PLACE: YORK COMMUNITY MEMORIAL HALL
2213 DUFFERIN STREET
TIME : 6pm - 1am

CHIEF MOURNERS

Mr. Alex Odoi Darku	Mr. & Mrs. Newton Odoi Darku (Kapito)
Mr. Michael Morton	Mr. & Mrs. Maxwell
Mr. Paul Adjin-Tettey	Dr. & Mrs. Kojo Lamptey
Mr. Evans Nettey	Mr. & Mrs. Richard Ofori
Mr. Chester Adotey	Mr. & Mrs. Allotey
Mr. Clarence Brown	Mr. & Mrs. Jimmy Apreku
Mr. Robert Ben Kwofie	Mr. & Mrs. Yaw Toku (PaaPee)
Mr. Aaron Tetteh	Mr. & Mrs. Kwaku Dua Agyemang
Mr. Francis De-Heer	Mr. & Mrs. Robert Mensah
Mr. Frederick Ofori-Addo	Miss Stella Asante

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CALL
748-1093 or 740-1113

APPENDIX FIVE

THE POURING OF LIBATIONS AMONG ASHANTIS

A libation is the act of pouring out drinks to objects of worship or ancestors. The Ashanti word for libation is nsagu which connects a libation with the act of pouring wine. The words mpaeyi or mpaebo are also sometimes used to denote libations. However, libations are not only concerned with the pouring out of alcoholic drinks but sometimes water or any other liquid.

There are several happy or sad occasions on which Ashantis pour libations. The occasions include outdoorings ceremonies, puberty rites, marriage rites, funeral rites, festivals, when someone is making a journey, during the outbreak of an epidemic, when friends meet to entertain themselves. Sometimes when an educated person visits relatives in a village such a person is welcomed by the pouring of a libation.

Various drinks such as rum, schnapps, palm wine, beer, and akpeteshie (Ghanaian local gin) are used. The drink used during the pouring of libation depends on the occasion and the taste of the god(s) and ancestor(s) in question. The drinks used during festivals may be different from the drinks used when friends meet to entertain themselves. Water is used on certain occasions. For example, during outdoorings ceremonies water is used together with some alcoholic drinks or in emergency cases when there is nothing at hand except water. Amponsah (1975:49) says water is also used at the death of a first child who is less than a year old. Generally, I think, water is used on unimportant occasions while

costly drinks are used on special occasions. Among the Ashantis the favorite drink often used is schnapps though certain gods are said to prefer the local drinks such as palm wine.

A libation comprises not only the physical act of pouring liquid but also the invocation of the supreme being, the ancestors and the lesser gods. The words (or prayers) that accompany the pouring of libations are as important as the pouring of liquid. The words depend on the occasion. The names of the object(s) of worship are mentioned in a certain order. Normally, the name of the supreme being is mentioned first or last but does not come in between. Opoku (1970:30) gives an example as follows:

Oh, Tweadumpon Kwame,
Toturobonsu, The rain-maker
Amaowia - The giver of sunshine,
Receive drink,
Yaa, the Earth goddess,
Receive drink;
Kyenku god, here is drink for you.
(Opoku 1970:30)

The content of the prayers depends on the purpose of the libation and also the occasion. According to Amponsah (1975:50) there is no stringent rule for the type of prayers during libations but one often observes that the prayers follow a certain pattern. The prayers consist of invocations of the object(s) to whom the libation is being poured. At funerals the names of various Ashanti deities are mentioned and several ancestors recalled. The reason for the pouring of the libation is also announced, followed by a requests for long life, good health, peace, grace, rain, etc. Amponsah (50) notes that people

are careful not to forget to deliver curses on their enemies and pray for material blessings for their well-wishers. The names of those mentioned in the invocation are mentioned again, and the drink is poured as each name is mentioned one after the other. The person pouring the drink makes sure that some liquid remains in the bottle or the glass to be shared.

The words accompanying the pouring of the libation are said aloud in the hearing of all present, and at certain times, especially during funeral rites, others stand by and spontaneously express aloud approval of, or concurrence with the content of the prayer. However, not all libations are accompanied by utterances. Certain libations are without words, most especially when two or three people meet to partake of a small drink. But in cases where words are not uttered those participating in the ceremonies know what prayers would have accompanied them.

The normal procedure for the pouring of a libation is for the officiant to move forward from the group, bare the chest and take off his or her sandals as a sign of respect and awe to the gods and the ancestors. The glass containing the drink is lifted by the right hand. It is a taboo to use the left hand in the pouring of libation; it is a sign of disrespect, and the gods may be angry.

Among the Ashantis the pouring of a libation is considered a necessary act because it is seen as a process which tends to keep the group closer to the ancestors and the gods. Communicating

with the gods and ancestors through the pouring of libations gives the Ashantis confidence and security, as an informant told me, to go about their daily activities.

Through the act of pouring libations Ashantis take cognisance of the presence of the dead who have an interest in their daily affairs.

APPENDIX SIX

SAMPLES OF INTERVIEWS (TRANSCRIBED TAPES)

Below are sample excerpts of two interviews with two Ashantis. The first interview was with Kofi Asare of Toronto on September 8, 1990. The second interview was with Kwame Opoku, also of Toronto on January 12, 1991.

Kofi, who is forty-two years, is a store owner and married to an Ashanti woman with whom he has three children (a boy and two girls). He has been in Canada for ten years after having stayed in Italy for four years; he has, therefore, been away from Ghana for a total of fourteen years.

Kofi was introduced to me by a friend at an Ashanti funeral in Toronto on July 3, 1990. I realized during our conversation that Kofi was an Ashanti well versed in Ashanti funeral customs. I was writing a proposal for this thesis, so I collected Kofi's address and telephone number. When my thesis proposal was approved, I phoned him and he agreed to spare about an hour for an interview with me. He very willingly agreed to my request to tape record the interview.

The transcribed interview below is just an excerpt.

Paul: Kofi, I understand that you've been away from Ghana for about fourteen years. Have you visited Ghana within this period that you have been away?

Kofi: Yes. If my memory serves me right, I have visited Ghana on four occasions.

Paul: What was the purpose of your visits to Ghana?

Kofi: On three occasions to attend funeral rites, and on the fourth occasion to check on the possibility of starting a business.

Paul: What made you decide to leave Ghana?

Kofi: Well, as you might know, the economic situation in Ghana is just hell so when a cousin of mine, who had migrated earlier to Italy, invited me over to the place I didn't hesitate accepting the offer. I later decided to come to Canada.

Paul: What would you say has been some of your experiences here in Canada as an immigrant.

Kofi: Initially, everything seem very frustrating. I can speak English very well and I thought that was an asset to getting a job really fast. However, job never came my way till after two months stay.

Paul: How were you paying your rents/bills and eating?

Kofi: I stayed with two cousins during the first two months and they saw to everything. During my third month a member of the church I belonged to (i.e., United Church) gave me a room for half of the supposed rent for a year, and that really helped me tremendously.

Other questions about his family were asked (i.e., age of children, where attending schools, experiences at work place, etc.)

Paul: As I told you when we met at the funeral in July and in our last telephone conversation, I am about to start writing a thesis on Ashanti funeral rites as it is practiced here in Toronto. I, therefore, need to interview Ashantis here in Toronto concerning the subject. To what extent would you describe yourself as being knowledgeable with regard to the traditional Ashanti funeral rites?

Kofi: I was born in Kumasi (i.e., the capital town of Ashanti) and I stayed there till I was 21. I don't think there is any Ashanti who was born and stayed in Kumasi for such a period who will be ignorant of traditional Ashanti funeral customs.

Paul: What makes you think so?

Kofi: Every Ashanti by the age of ten would have seen funeral rites performed and heard, at least, about things like the giving of water to the dying person, not reporting death in plain language, and the role or activities supposed to be performed by the ancestors. Most of these things are learnt through the evening story telling.

Paul: I was going to ask you to provide me with some details concerning Ashanti funeral rites, but it seems you have just

mentioned some of the things I wanted to ask you about. What is the essence of giving the dying person some water to drink?

Kofi: The belief is that a dead person travels to another place and would have to climb mountains. The last drink is believed to help the person climb the mountains.

Paul: How about the idea of not reporting death in plain language like you mentioned?

Kofi: To the Ashanti, a person does not die; a deceased just travels back to where he/she came from.

Paul: Having stayed in Europe and North America for a total of fourteen years, what do you now think about the idea of a deceased person not being considered as dead but staying elsewhere?

Kofi: I don't think this idea is peculiar to the Ashantis. Doesn't it exist in Christianity, Islam, and other religious traditions found in Europe and America?

Paul: My concern here is the degree of faith that the individuals have in life after death beyond what they say and do officially during funeral rites.

Kofi: Well, that is very difficult to say. Personally, I don't know whether or not there is life after death. Perhaps, I am currently more inclined to think life is here and now, and one has to make the best of it before he dies and rots away.

Paul: How many Ashanti funeral rites have you attended in Toronto since you came to Canada?

Kofi: There is hardly a month without an Ashanti funeral rites in Toronto. On the average, I would say, I attend three in a year.

Paul: How different do you see Ashanti funeral rites as performed in Toronto from as performed in, for example, Kumasi?

Kofi: Ashantis in Toronto try as much as possible to perform the rites just as it is performed in Kumasi. But, of course, we are looking at two different settings; one is the indigenous environment and the other, a "foreign" environment. Consequently, there are some differences. Those that immediately come to mind are the inability to give a dying person the last drink in deaths occurring here in Canada because, in most cases, deaths occur in hospitals. Secondly there is much drumming and dancing in the "open air" (i.e., outside a hall) during funeral rites in Kumasi but in Toronto, in most cases, drumming is absent and rites are confined in a hall.

Paul: You mentioned earlier on that you have visited Ghana to attend funerals on three occasions. Whose funerals were these and was it imperative you attended?

Kofi: Two were funeral rites for my granduncles and one was the funeral rites for my late mother. All the three people helped in making me what I am today. Ashanti custom demands that all relatives attend the funeral rites of a family member. Concerning the three funeral rites that I attended in Ghana, I personally felt a strong sense of obligation to attend.

Paul: Was the obligation you felt to travel all the way to Ghana to attend the funeral rites borne out of fear?

Kofi: Fear of what?

Paul: Fear of what the ancestors might do to you, or may be fear of being ostracized by your extended family in Ghana.

Kofi: I do not dispute the belief that ancestors can harm relations for failing to attend funeral rites. There have also been several occasions when relations between a person and the extended family has been strained because the person in question did not attend the funeral rites of a relative. With regard to the particular funerals I attended, I did so because I thought it was a way of expressing my gratitude towards them for all the good things they did for me while they were alive. May be the two factors you mentioned also served as a catalyst in making me attend those funeral rites in Ghana.

Paul: What future do you envisage for Ashanti funeral rites as practised here in Toronto, and what suggestions do you have for those involved?

Kofi: To the Ashanti, funeral rites are second to no other social activity; for this reason, funeral rites will always be performed. I think too much money is spent for funeral rites and my suggestion is that expenses for funeral rites should be minimized.

Portions of an interview with Kwame Opoku

Paul: Kwame, you look thirty to me.

Kwame: You nearly got it right. I am thirty-five years old.

Paul: As I mentioned in our last telephone conversation, I am writing a thesis on Ashanti funeral rites as practised here in Toronto. Knowing you are an Ashanti who performed your uncle's funeral rites here in Toronto three months ago, I deemed it

fitting adding your name to the list of my informants for interview. I have just learnt your age; can you tell me a bit about your background (i.e., marital status, children, occupation, length of time you have been in Toronto, etc.).

Kwame: I am an Ashanti like you know, married to Serwaa (also an Ashanti) and we have two children (a boy who is six and a girl who is four). I am a teacher by profession but currently working in a garment factory as a supervisor. This is my seventh year in Toronto.

Paul: How many times have you visited home since you came to Canada?

Kwame: Twice.

Paul: What was the purpose of your visits?

Kwame: On the first occasion it was to attend my grandmother's funeral rites, and on the second occasion my uncle's funeral rites.

Paul: Was it imperative you travelled all the way to Africa just to attend funeral rites?

Kwame: It might sound strange or even senseless to you but to an Ashanti it is customary, and no respectful Ashanti will fail in that regard. It would be disgraceful for an Ashanti to merely refuse, without a good reason, to attend the funeral rites of a close maternal relative.

Paul: How close were you to your uncle whose funeral rites you attended in Ghana?

Kwame: Being my mother's eldest child, it falls on me automatically to succeed my uncle as the chief of the village. I stayed with my uncle throughout my childhood.

Paul: Do you mean therefore that you are now a chief?

Kwame: Yes.

Paul: Can I conclude then that with your presence here in Toronto, the village is without a chief?

Kwame: It is not as simple as you are thinking. I thought you said you are studying funeral rites; do you want to change your topic to chieftaincy?

Paul: Studying a topic like funeral rites requires one to know about other topics as well. Any way, back to the precise topic then. Was your maternal uncle whose funeral rites you attended in

Ghana the same uncle for whom you performed the funeral rites here in Toronto last three months?

Kwame: Yes.

Paul: Why did you decide to perform another funeral rite here in Toronto for him besides the one performed in Ghana?

Kwame: To enable people here in Toronto who could not make it all the way to Ghana have the opportunity to share in the funeral rites. For various reasons like, for example, having filed for a refugee status here in Canada some could not travel home. In any case, it is not unusual for Ashantis to perform periodic funeral rites for a deceased whose funeral rites has already been performed.

Paul: What is the significance of the periodic funeral rites?

Kwame: It is a way of keeping in touch with the dead and making them aware that we have not forgotten about them.

Paul: How did you go about organizing the funeral rites here in Toronto?

Kwame: Well, I did not organize things all by myself. The executive members of the Ashanti Association and some good friends helped me. They have organized several funeral rites here in Toronto so they knew exactly what to do. People already knew about my uncle's death and were expecting me to do "something" here in Toronto. We had invitation cards printed and mailed out to invitees; the date, time and venue for the rites were all stated on the invitation cards. We then rented in advance York Community Memorial Hall (2213 Dufferin Street) for the occasion. Some of the wives of my friends decided to help my wife prepare traditional Ashanti dishes for the occasion, and I bought drinks. A good friend of mine agreed to provide Ghanaian music and another friend, who owns a video camera, agreed to video record the rites. With this background arrangements, everything was set for the occasion. All that was left was the arrangement of seats in the hall and for this, several friends volunteered.

Paul: You make it sound so easy to organize Ashanti funeral rites in Toronto. Is it that easy?

Kwame: I have just given you a gist and may be that is why it sounds easy to you. It was not very easy. I had great help from people who had organized such rites before.

Paul: An informant told me that Ashanti funeral rites are very expensive and suggested that the cost involved in organizing the funeral rites should be minimized. What is your opinion?

Kwame: I personally believe that everything that is worth doing,

is worth doing well. People attend funeral rites to celebrate and have fun (no matter how strange that might sound to you). You can't invite people and give them just water to drink. Among other things the success of Ashanti funeral rites here in Toronto is judged by the food and drinks served, music provided, and even the place rented for the occasion; all these involve money. It is the wish, I believe, of every Ashanti to have or be part of a funeral celebration that can be termed successful or well done; for it to be such, one need not bother too much about the cost involved.

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