

WE ATTEND BUT NO LONGER DANCE

Changes in Mafa funeral practices due to Islamization

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ABSTRACT

"I had left my husband and lived with an uncle, but he was very often mad at me, so I left him and went to live with my sister who had become a Muslim. As I was living with her in the Muslim quarter I asked myself : If I die who will bury me? In the mountains they will say : " Oooo she does not belong to us anymore as she is living with the Muslims". And here they will say : "Oooh, she is living with us, bus she is not a Muslim"... That would be very awkward wouldn't it? So I decided to become a Muslim too and so I did". The Mafa in the Mandara mountains have a complicated system of rules and rituals to accompany their deads on the threshold of their new life after the one in the actual world. Everyone will start a new life underneath the soil to die another four times, until one finally reaches the red soil, that will be the last life. Due to Fulbe hegemony in the last two centuries, many Mafa have converted to Islam, which promises an afterlife in heaven that will last for ever. What do islamized Mafa do with the funeral practices their ancestors taught them, after Islamization? Do they still attend and carry out the rules whenever a non-islamized relative has died? What combinations can be made of the old and new practices? These questions will be dealt with in this paper.

Keywords : North Cameroon, Mafa, Islamization, burial rites, beliefs about death.

RÉSUMÉ

"ON Y VA MAIS ON NE DANSE PLUS".

Changements dans les pratiques funéraires mafa après l'islamisation.

Cet article donne une description et une analyse des croyances et des rites liés à la mort et aux funérailles chez les Mafa non-islamisés et islamisés dans le Nord-Cameroun. Pour les funérailles, chez les Mafa non-islamisés, nous retrouvons les catégories décrites par van Gennep et Thomas : rites de séparation, de transition et de réintégration. L'analyse de ces différentes catégories a permis de découvrir que dans les rites de séparation et de transition il s'agit d'une inversion des symboles de la vie courante en symboles cosmologiques, alors que le même ordre est restauré dans les rites de réintégration. Chez les Mafa islamisés, nous pouvons distinguer les mêmes catégories mais moins complexes. Les inversions ont disparu, et les rites sont plus sobres : plus de chants ni de danses. En comparant ces deux mondes, l'auteur a essayé de trouver une réponse sur ces faits assez intrigants. Les non-islamisés ont une vue de la vie que l'on peut qualifier de circulaire et répétitive (spirale) contrôlée par les ancêtres et par de nombreux dieux. Par contre les islamisés ont une vue linéaire, ils communiquent directement avec Dieu (Allah) par la prière sans l'intermédiaire de petits dieux. Après la mort, l'âme des islamisés part directement au paradis ou en enfer sans dépendre des ancêtres ou autres dieux, ce qui explique la disparition de ces rites complexes où l'on a besoin de tromper l'âme de celui qui est mort.

Mots-Clés : Nord-Cameroun, Mafa, Islamisation, islamisés, Rites de funérailles, croyances sur la mortalité.

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It is the sixth of July 1987. We are having breakfast, when my friend Maimouna comes rushing in. "Come along", she says, "we are going to attend a Mafa funeral, and as you have not yet witnessed one you'd better come with us". I leave my breakfast and rush out behind her as everybody else is ready to leave. "Everybody" means several next-door women neighbours from our quarter. We are living in a Muslim quarter in a small town in North Cameroon in the Mandara mountains, which is situated in the midst of the Mafa area. These people are horticulturalists. In the countryside they continue to practice their own religion.

We are on our way. I have no idea yet where we are going, or who died and what relation the dead person is to either of these women. It does not seem appropriate to ask such questions right now. I guess I will find out in due time.

We leave the town behind us and enter the mountains. We have to walk and climb for at least two hours before we reach our destination: a traditional Mafa compound. When we pass the entrance hut, we notice many women sitting quietly together in the courtyard. Nobody speaks. These are all non-Islamized Mafa women, but we have to sit inside one of the huts with another group: the Muslim people. Two men I remember having seen in town are sitting on a mat, and three women I have met before. I recognize Fatima among them. That is the Islamic name she got when she went over to Islam. She is married to the son of our next-door neighbour, and they tell me that it is her grandmother who died. I hold her hands to express my sympathy, and afterwards I do the same with the others. They all speak in low voices. First we sit for a while; water is offered to us in a bowl different from the one the non-Islamized people use. Then we have to enter the hut where the dead person is laid in state. I was afraid it would smell, since the Mafa do not bury their dead until one or two days after death, but there is a fire burning inside the hut, and the smoke is so strong that it prevents us from smelling anything else. They tell me afterwards that this is to keep the flies away from the dead body, and to keep the body warm.

Fatima's mother is sitting next to the dead person; she draws back the sheet that covers the body. The head has already been wrapped in a goatskin. We say "aaaaaaaah" and "ooooooooooooh" to express our sympathy and then return to our mat to mourn. After us, others enter the hut where the dead person is laid out. When all the visitors have come inside, the men start to play the *edinger*, drums used at funerals. They also use a percussion instrument, a calabash, that they strike against a stick to which strings of small rings are attached. Then the non-Islamized women start to dance, though not very exuberantly; grief is clearly visible on their faces. The men dance differently. They put their hands on the back of their heads and hop from one foot to the other. The Muslim women watch the dancers cry, but they do not join in the dance.

After a while two women remain on the dance floor. One of them is Fatima's mother, the other one her sister, both daughters of the deceased. They carry a calabash in their hands as they go up and down the dance floor repeating "oooh mam-gay, oooh mam-gay" (oooh, mother of the

house), and adding other phrases in praise of their dead mother: "Ooooooh, mother of the house, why have you left me? Ooooooh mother of the house, you have gone, only your calabash remains, why ooooh why...".

This extolling of the deceased lasts quite a while. Then the men enter the inner court of the compound and start to cry in the typical Mafa way: holding their hands on their heads and hopping from one foot to the other. The blacksmith picks up the body of the dead woman and places it in the entrance hut on a wet goatskin. Meanwhile, the daughters of the dead person wave bunches of millet straws to prevent the flies from alighting on the body. Everybody watches this and all of us are crying; we too are crying. The blacksmith folds the goatskin around the dead woman's loins, like a nappy, and sews it in place.

Before she is carried to her grave, the sky becomes increasingly dark and a strong wind starts to blow. Black clouds seem to be playing a ball game with the sun. It is beautiful to watch, but the Islamic women decide to return home quickly. Bad weather is on the way, and they cannot stay overnight in a non-Islamic compound.

Fatima and the other Muslim women leave with us, and we hurry home. It turns quite cold. I am shivering. Near town the first drops of rain and the darkness catch up with us. When I arrive home I am soaking wet ... and dead tired.

INTRODUCTION

We have witnessed one day of a Mafa funeral.

As I mentioned above the Mafa are horticulturalists. Their compounds can be found scattered over the area. The mountain sides are strewn with contour terraces on which they grow millet, their staple crop. They do own sheep and goats though not in large flocks. The bulls that can be found in some compounds are used mainly for ritual purposes. The importance of millet for the Mafa is reflected in their numerous rituals in which millet beer plays an important role. They are a highly decentralized people with no overall political system (Martin 1970).

Yet many people have left this old life-style behind and come to Mokolo. This small town was founded in the midst of their area -with the help of German colonial authorities- by an Islamic Fulbe chief at the beginning of this century. When the French took over in 1918, the village grew. The captured slaves who became muslims returned. The French administration attracted people to work for them, mostly Islamic of Fulbe origin. These people in turn, attracted new Muslim "dignitaries" of ethnic Mafa origin. Until recently, people who moved to town went over to Islam, since employment and access to commercial activities was difficult for the non-Islamized population.

This article deals with Mafa funeral practices and the changes that take place within these funeral rites after conversion to Islam. The rituals they practice in their own religion after the death of a person are much more

complicated than that described above; they usually last many days and nights. These funeral rituals exhibit a unique pattern of actions. Yet like many African societies, the Mafa perceive death as the bridge between one life and the next. Their actual life is just one among many others. As Thomas stated:

"Le système de croyances refuse la brutalité des faits et par le médium du symbolique renverse la situation: la mort n'est plus la fin irréversible de la vie mais un moment particulier de celle-ci, source de régénérescence" (1982:72).

Does this perception change and can change after Islamization be understood from a different perspective of life after death?

After a short overview of certain religious beliefs, and of practices and beliefs concerning the after-life, a more detailed description of a Mafa funeral in the non-Islamic community will be given. Van Gennep divided rituals of passage -and we may classify funeral rites as such- into three categories. Mourning, he stated, is a transitional period for the survivors. They enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (van Gennep, 1960 : 18). Rites of separation accompany the dead person in his or her next life. Rites of transition (p. 18 ff.) place various restrictions upon the mourning relatives and require special behaviour during the mourning period. Finally, there are the rites of reintegration (p. 147), which help the mourning persons return to normal life and bring the mourning period to a close. Thomas also divides funeral rites into separation rites and reintegration rites (Thomas 1983:75). I will follow these categories in my description.

Then the funerals of Islamized Mafa people in Mokolo will be discussed. What still remains of their original mourning practices?

Then I will connect the features of the Mafa symbolic system with the funeral practices of the non-Islamic community and finally compare these with the funeral practices adopted after Islamization. This comparison will not only elucidate the enormous change in cosmology people underwent after Islamization but they also explain why the funeral rituals no longer need to be carried out.

Mafa religious life and the afterlife

The Mafa believe that the world was created by a single God, Jigile, who reigns over life. The most important feature of Mafa religion is the sacrifice that is offered to Jigile. For the sake of linguistic convenience, I will refer to Jigile in the masculine form.

A sacrifice can be made on many occasions: festivals, rituals, but also in the event of misfortune, like illnesses and of course a funeral. The Mafa ask Jigile for anything he can possibly give; for instance as a male informant stated: women, millet, goats and sheep, peace, and rain. Confronted with this statement, my female assistant added a list of gifts women may ask for: a good husband, millet, a good harvest of peanuts and beans, and children.

Because Jigile is so far away the demands made to him are divided into demands on all sorts of gods that surround the Mafa people. In their religious practices it is nearly impossible to differentiate between the "small" gods and Jigile. Everyone also has his or her own protector god, whose identity is exactly the same as that of the person he or she protects. People say this guardian is like a shadow:

"...these are the ones that are always next to you. If you marry, your shadow marries; if you have a child, your shadow has a child; if you are a thief, your shadow is a thief; and if you die, your shadow dies. They are like twins..."

So every person is always a double being, with a visible and an invisible part. Behind everything, every being, there is a double entity to support the visible one (Boisseau & Soula 1974:203). Or, as I have argued elsewhere, this comprises a twin principle (van Santen 1989). Living twins are the ultimate manifestation of this principle and thus have special powers and need to be respected. They are the direct offspring of the divine world; their social father is not their progenitor, though he has the responsibility for the twin-rituals, that are very important in Mafa society. If these rituals are not performed, twins can cause harm often in the form of blindness or mist in which people get lost. Women are also associated with the number two, with evenness, and hence are also associated with the primordial past. Through a twin ritual, the ordering of this patriarchal society, associated with "three", "unevenness" and "male" is restored (van Santen 1993a). The balance between evenness and unevenness needs to be kept. This double entity is a feature that occurs in other African societies. In connection with death, Thomas remarks:

"La notion de double est particulièrement multivoque. Si l'on entend par double l'animal totémique, la parenté de destin est flagrante entre le sujet et son double symbolique: en vertu de leur participation ontologique et existentielle, la mort de l'un entraîne la mort de l'autre. Quand le double désigne l'ombre, celle-ci est comparable à l'âme légère ou l'âme-oiseau" (Thomas 1982:88).

According to the Mafa, the shadow, which I call the tutelary god, has given a child to a smaller god, who then put it in the belly of the mother. This tutelary god will accompany the child from birth till death. It serves especially to protect people against the *mide*, who can eat human souls. Any human being can be a *mide*; one never knows in advance, only afterwards when the harm is done.

During the night, when people are asleep, the personal god takes the soul, *me jeb*, along with him or her. If, for example, my personal god is not satisfied with me, she can leave my soul behind during the night. This means that the *mide*, the soul eater, can easily take away my soul. This would mean that my personal god is just leaving me to die. This is what the Mafa call "a bad death".

Jigile, God, also had his own personal god. Now if he, Jigile, must make a sacrifice to his own personal god, he offers human beings. In that case, he tells the personal Gods of those human beings to go and gather some souls.

As he is the Supreme Being, he can do with life whatever he wants. So the personal gods will do as they are told. They give the souls to Jigile, who can be so kind as to make them return to the human beings again, in that way continuing the life of those persons on earth. But he can also crush them, as a sacrifice to his own personal god. Then the owner of the soul on earth will die a better death than the one described above, though "dying remains awkward", as my informants put it.

The Mafa distinguish several kinds of jars in which they make sacrifices. The most important one is the *guid-pat* (literally, "at the foot of the bed, "because that's where this jar is kept). This type of jar is given to a person immediately after birth, and it represents the other side of his or her being, her or his tutelary spirit.

Besides sacrifices to a god, sacrifices also have to be made to the ancestors. When a person dies, the jar called *guid-pat* is broken. But another jar will be made for the deceased by the potter (who belongs to the blacksmith caste) if the diviner (*ndo pikwa*) has so instructed. The first-born son will keep the jar of the father, the last-born son keeps that of the mother. His mother will always stay with him, whether she is dead or alive. If a person has no male children, the first-born daughter will have the jar made for her parents and do the necessary sacrifices.

Another obvious manifestation in Mafa society is the fact that women are associated with right and men with left. This becomes evident from the following facts; when making love, which is preferably done while lying on one's side, a woman should never put her left arm over the man as this is the male side. Fathers of twins always carry around a calabash to drink their beer on their left pulse; women drink their beer on the right side of the house.

I said above that behind every being there is a double entity to support the visible one. If a person dies, his or her shadow continues to live in the earth. As an old lady explains:

"If a human being dies, she or he starts rotting, but it is his or her shadow, which is always beside a person, that descends into the earth and continues to live on. There was a white person in Koza who opened up a grave and saw the people actually dancing in it but they could not come out of the earth anymore. Then a Mafa told the white person that he should never open up a grave again, because people might start thinking that being dead was a much better life than being alive. It was the shadow of the one living on earth that the white man saw, the ones that are always next to you."

Under the earth, life continues as before. A second invisible being will accompany them again. People cultivate, they marry, have children, and finally die. Then they continue to live on even deeper under the earth until they die again. This too is a feature of many African religions:

"Pourtant bien souvent, le "paradis" négro-africain est représenté comme une réplique de la vie réelle ; mais sans doute faudrait-il distinguer entre l'homme ordinaire qui l'exprime en termes de quotidienneté et le sage qui le définit plutôt en termes de spiritualité."
(Thomas 1983 : 99)

This recurs five times until they have reached the red soil; then life will cease. They say literally: "That is the end of the earth".

They call it the red soil, because in former days people greased their bodies for festivities with a red powder, called *ms ak*. When people finally die they become dust again. And because of this powder, this dust will be red.

By that time, the jars, representing the parents, will have been broken, and sacrifices will no longer be held for them. The soul is taken by God, after every death. If you get on to the next life, you get another soul again. When we die we will meet the people who lived while we were alive, but we cannot meet the people from the former generation, as they will already have moved on to the next earth.

Mafa funerals

The acts surrounding Mafa funerals are complicated and numerous. If they are not performed right they can harm the deceased. Then the dead person will keep wandering around and in turn harm the next of kin and other relations. Within the ritual the blacksmith plays an important role. Because blacksmiths bury the dead they form an endogamous cast (see also Podlewski 1990). The women of this caste are potters and midwives. The rituals described below¹ are those which take place after the death of an elderly man.

The type of death influences the length of the mourning period (Thomas 1982:101). Among the Mafa, funeral rites for a highly respected person who died a good death may last up to ten days. People stated that the period was shorter for women. But for an ordinary man, the funeral rites did not last that long either and could be shorter than the rites for a highly respected elderly lady.

¹ Podlewski's description of a Mafa funeral has basically the same facts. However he does not mention the important place of women in the rituals, nor the reversal of daily life situations (Podlewski 1990). N. David (this volume) does mention the fact that some men are buried sitting straight up, but does not connect this fact with the important bull-fest ritual.

The Mafa distinguished the good and the bad death as follows:

Men		Women	
good	bad	good	bad
- elderly	- young	- elderly	- young
- having had children(male and female)	- no children	- having had children(male and female)	- no children
soul crushed by		soul crushed by	
- Jigile	- mide	- Jigile	- mide
- having done the bull feast (maray)			

In our description of a funeral, we will follow the case of a father of seven sons, a generous and well-respected person who had been able to attend the bull feast (maray) several times, during which he was able to sacrifice a bull. This act gives a man considerable status and affects the length of the mourning rituals and how he will be buried.

Before he died he spent some time in hospital, but his case seemed hopeless. They had told him it had something to do with the liver. He had been returned to his compound on a handcar, because his brother said he wanted to make a sacrifice on his behalf at his own place. But after the sacrifice, the man said he preferred to be taken to his child's home to die there. "When I die at my own place", he had said, "those who have died before me will bother me too much". So he died at his child's home.

It is important that the relatives and close friends and neighbours of the deceased attend the funeral. During the rites the drums should be beaten as a Mafa man said,

"with all the force that is left in you. The forefathers have said that you should cry aloud and beat the drums, so hat the dead father will overhear and will be able to say: 'Oooh listen to my children, how they love me because they are beating the drums for me'."

Rites of separation

Rites of separation are the procedures by which the corpse is transported outside the compound, and the tools of the deceased are burnt; But they also include the physical manifestations of separation like the grave, or the periodic collective rites to expel souls from the house (van Gennep 1960:164).

Bab-gay Mania died on the 24th of April, 1988. Some of his children were around. So were the neighbours, who called for the other children. When they arrived the little sister of the dead person was next to him, representing his eldest daughter. The first-born daughter of a man is

supposed to stay next to her dead father, and she has an important role in funeral rites. In this case she lived too far away so she could not arrive in time.

The little sister washes the body and covers his sex. This should always be done by a female, preferably his first-born daughter. If he did not have any sisters, they would have taken the first-born girl of his first-born child. If that would not have been possible, it could have been his wife who could wash the body. The wife also remains next to the one who washes the body, as she should not stay on her own while doing this¹. They call for the blacksmith.

On the first day, the drums (*dĩngèr*) are taken out and beaten. All the people from the patriclan of the mother of the deceased, his children, and the neighbours are present that morning. They leave for a place they call *wam* in Mafa, after a special tree that stands, as they express it, on a particular spot. They take a piece of bark from this tree and burry it. Then they return home again. The blacksmith looks at the stones like a diviner, to find out if the dead person holds any grudges against one of the living. Then a cock is slaughtered and eaten by the blacksmith.

On the second day they call for the blacksmith again. He has to kill a goat, which should be provided by the eldest son of the deceased and serves as payment for the blacksmith's work. The sheep or goat should not bleat while being killed. Therefore it is slaughtered in a special way. They close the mouth while the animal is standing upright and they stick the knife right into its throat. The blood should flow into its belly.

When the animal dies, they take it outside the house and strip off the skin on a stone lying on the right outside the house. It has to be the right side, as the male body was brought in from that side. A female body would be taken in from the left side. This is a reversal of the ordinary situation in which left is associated with masculinity and right with femininity.

Normally the head of the deceased person will be wrapped in the goatskin. The rest of the dead body will be wound in a white piece of cloth, with strips of goat skin around the pulses and ankles. But this man had killed a bull for the bull feast, so he will be wrapped in a bull skin.

Inside the house the blacksmith and the relatives tell the dead man that they are going to fetch the jar that represents his father. Afterwards, this jar will be broken. The blacksmith's wife, the potter, will make a new one. It will be given to the deceased's brother, so that in the future he will be able to make the sacrifices for him. If the brothers are no longer around, it will be given to his sons. The *guid-pat* of the deceased, the jar that represents his second being, will also be taken outside. If the deceased had twins, he will have the special twin pot (*tsakalay*), in which yearly rituals have been carried out for the twins. This pot should never be exposed to the sunshine or daylight and especially now needs to be well covered.

¹ Women are washed by the youngest daughter of their close friend, *gowda*. Children are washed by their mother or the sister of their mother.

Beside the body a fire is built with sheep dung, jujube wood (**wandar**), and another piece of wood, **ga-agd** (from a tree that loses its leaves during the dry season).

The eldest daughter, in this case the younger sister who represents her, takes place beside the body to chase away the flies. The other sisters who have arrived to attend the funeral bring along a calabash with millet, peanuts, weed, or beans, all female crops.

When the bull skin has been brought into the hut of the dead man, he is taken to the entrance. Then all his children, his sisters, and his brothers must sing while the blacksmith wraps his head in this skin. The neighbors and other people who attend the funeral remain outside, where the men beat the drums. The women dance and sing about the dead person and their grief, for instance: "ooh, **bab-gay**, (father of the house) why did you leave us?"

When the deceased is wrapped up, they take him outside by the right-hand side door. They prop him up on a large stone outside the hut but inside the courtyard, while the blacksmith stays behind to hold him up. Everybody approaches, one by one, and kneels down in front of the body.

Then the first-born girl, his eldest daughter, leaves the compound, her calabash filled with pebbles; she throws these in the direction of the grave¹.

Before being brought to the cemetery, the deceased, his wives and his children make a round about the house, two times if the first-born was a girl, three times if the first-born was a boy. They can make this roundabout now, but they should never do this while the father of the house is still alive. Never should the wives and female children of a man go round about the compound. If, for example, one of his wives needs to pick up something on the other side of the compound, she should return halfway and reach the particular spot passing by the entrance of the house again. (If she does go round it is said that it would kill her husband.) The second child (two-female) of the female twins cannot even make this roundabout in the funeral period, though the first one (one-male) can. If the **kala-yam**, the next child to be born after twins, is a girl, she cannot make this circle around the compound either. If the **kala-yam** is a boy, he can. When the female twin or **kala-yam** are married, their mother-in-law can make this roundabout for them.

¹ According to one informant, the dead person will now leave for a last visit to the compounds of his male children and his close friends. The blacksmith will carry him along the way. First the house of his dearest friend (**matla'i**), alike a second son; afterwards to his eldest son, and the other sons. Doing this he should be accompanied by his eldest daughter. But he should not leave the compound by the door; a hole must be made in his hut, through which he can leave the house for the last time. Returning from this last visit, he enters again by the same hole. He will finally leave the house to be buried by the doorway of the entrance hut of the compound. At a later date, other people told me that paying a last visit was only done by the Kapsiki people, and that leaving the hut through a hole was something only done for the mountain chief. Regional differences probably explain these different accounts.

The numbering remains important. If a father's first-born child is male, they will bury him after two days; if the first-born is female, they will bury him after three days. But if the children live far away and have not arrived yet, they may still wait. The blacksmith will carry the body to its grave and bury it.

When that time comes the first-born daughter leaves first. The blacksmith walks behind her carrying the body to the grave. They immediately return to the compound again. They do so three times if the first-born was a boy and twice if the first-born of the deceased was a girl.

The old man is put in his grave sitting up straight. That is because during his lifetime he sacrificed a bull for the bull feast (*maray*). Otherwise he would have been buried lying down on his side. Male bodies are laid on the right side and female bodies on their left side. Stones are put at the back and the front of the body, so it will not fall on its belly or its back. If that should happen, it could cause another person's death. In the case of the burial of a child, the mother of the child could become sterile and not be able to give birth to another child.

When a person is buried sitting up, they put a flat stone on the grave. If she or he is laid down they bury her or him with sand and earth. In the case of children the blacksmith puts the body in the grave, turns his back towards the grave and, standing turned around, puts sand on the grave.

If it is filled with sand, stones are put on the grave. When the blacksmith has finished his job, a black pot is put on top of the grave. It contains a bit of food with a sauce of fat that has gone bad. Once the black pot is put on the grave the blacksmith should not look back anymore. If he would, it is said that he will die.

There are more dangers confronting the blacksmith. If, while carrying the body, the head falls backwards, he will die too. The same is true if the body starts jumping up and down as he carries it on his shoulders. The blacksmith will drop the body, flee far away from the homestead and look for a diviner, who will be able to tell him what sacrifice has to be made to undo the harm. In such cases he needs to go to another quarter of the area, for which one needs to cross a river. Another blacksmith will finish the job in that case. One informant tells us:

*"Once a body fell down in that way. I came back from school, they had left it just like that, I only heard the cries and the shouts from other people. I saw the wrapped-up body. I didn't know it was a body. I thought it was my father. I started to call for him: 'bab-gay, bab-gay' I cried aloud. Then people came to tell me it was the body of a dead person. I told them: 'liars, you are lying.' I touched the body. It moved, then I realized and started to cry, I fled ... People said it was because he was a diviner, a *mide*. He did not want to be buried by the blacksmith who was supposed to bury him, so he moved his body provokingly to have another blacksmith finish the job, finish his burial. But the blacksmith he preferred wasn't around, so that's why they had left him like that. Then a sorcerer arrived and they threw stones to ask the body by whom he*

wanted to be carried to his grave. The body answered that he wanted to be carried by his first-born son. This wish was fulfilled, and the body was at ease".

The blacksmith should not wash himself for the burial. Before he carries the body to its grave he undresses himself and wears only a goatskin around his loins. He throws sand over his nearly naked body like as if it were water. After the actual burial, when he has put the body in the grave, he turns his back towards the grave and takes off the skin around his loins. Being completely naked, he washes himself in front of everybody. The wet sand beside the burial place is put on the grave. The blacksmith should not look back; another blacksmith will put the stone on the grave. They will fetch the meat from the slaughtered goat, which they left in a tree, and they will return home ¹.

When the body has been buried the **guid-pat** -the pot representing the second being of the deceased- that had been taken outside, as well as the pot called "father" (**baba**), and the pot called **t sakalay**, representing the twins, will be questioned: who will be taking care of them in the future? The diviner throws the pebbles to divine and find the answer. He sacrifices a cock on the stones, the blood of which is put on the pots. Then the pots will be broken. The blacksmith's wife, the potter, will make new ones. They will be given to the brother of the deceased, so that in the future he will be able to make the necessary sacrifices. If no male is available, the offerings to **baba** may be done by women, but the sacrifice for the twins should never be performed by women.

His bed (a wooden shelf people sleep on) called **pat**, is also thrown outside.

Rites of transition

Rites of transition are described by van Gennep as the ceremonies that accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another, when one is wavering between two worlds (van Gennep 1960:18).

Before and after the actual burial, the family, friends and neighbors will continue to beat the drums, dance and sing. This may last for days, up to ten days for a very respected person and at least two days for an ordinary one. Those who come to attend the funeral festivities will bring food along. For the duration of these festivities the women should not wash themselves. Also during the night they beat the drums and sing. A burial I witnessed went as follows:

"Night falls early as the sky is covered with clouds. We sit and listen to the drumbeat. It is the last night of the first part of the mourning period. Food has been prepared by the daughter of the deceased to be eaten by the sons-in-law. To light the fire the wife or the eldest daughter may

¹ If the grave collapses after the funeral, the blacksmith will repair it. But if it continues to cave in, it means that the dead person wants one of his children with him, and you can be sure that one of them will die. To find out which person the deceased wants, they will pay a visit to the fetishist to ask for advice.

walk around the house to take a piece of straw from the roof to light the fire with. This is something they would never do during the lifetime of the father of the house.

During the dances the first-born sons and the first-born girls of all his wives dance with the material belongings of the dead father, like his shield, his bow and arrow, his hat, his spear, etc.

The second son (*mas lai*) went off with the blacksmith to get a piece of jujube wood (*wandar*). This second son had a special place in his father's life. On every special occasion, for example when their father got married again, he had to stay next to his father. That is because the second son represents the female, whereas the first son represents the male¹. During sacrifices or during the bull ritual he used to get the largest part of the slaughtered animal. During the funeral dances the first son dances with the bow that has a rope, as he represents the male, and the second son dances with the bow without a rope, as he represents the female.

Members of the mother's patriclan (*kuyuk*), pierce some pots herds from the pot that used to represent the father of the deceased. They put a string in it, made from the tree called *wam*, and they hang it around the neck of the children of the dead father. The beam that enclosed the door of the hut for the ritual bull is taken out and put on the fire. The warmth is very welcomed as the night is unbearably cold².

Beer has been prepared. It is taken out and brought on the right side of the compound on the spot where the body laid before it was buried. Only the daughters and the sisters of the dead father are allowed to drink this brew. As they drank the beer the blacksmith was the only male person who drank with them. He did so from his own calabash³.

Death outside the region

If a person dies in another area and the body cannot be taken home, usually the little finger is cut off, from the left hand for a male and from the right hand for a female, and taken home. This little finger will be buried as if it were the dead person, as in the following example:

"My brother had been run over by a car in M. We did not have money to pay a taxi to bring him home. So he was buried over there. Prisoners had to dig the hole, and the guy who had run over him had to do most of the work as it was him who had killed my brother. My father was full of grief. He had brought his bow and arrow ready to kill the guy who had killed his son, though nobody knew of his intention. He was quiet at first, but when he saw the body of his son, he pulled out an arrow and shot. The guy was hurt. They had to take out the arrow, and the other arrows they took away from my father and they had to calm him down. He said,

¹ It is not only this son who has this function but every first and every second son of each of the wives a father of the house ever had in his life and who bore him children.

² For those who never killed a ritual bull, another piece of wood will be taken from the *calcedra* tree.

³ People from the blacksmith caste and the ordinary caste should never drink or eat together. Nor should they eat from the same plate. His millet porridge is put in a calabash, unusual for ordinary people, and the sauce that goes with it in a black pot.

"If my son is no longer alive, the one who killed him should not be alive either". They offered him money but he refused. He said, "does that bring my son to life?"

When my brother was put into the grave, my mother jumped in as well. She was so full of grief that she wanted to be buried with her son. We had to take her out by force and console her. Then we took his little finger and took it home and the funeral rites started."

Rites of reintegration

These are the rites that lift all the regulations and prohibitions of mourning. The survivors enter the transitional period through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (van Gennep 1960:147).

During mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead. They leave this special world only through appropriate rites and only at a moment when even a physical relationship is no longer discernible. Meals shared after funerals and at commemoration celebrations can be considered rites of reintegration.

In the case of **Bab-gay Mania**, one month later beer is prepared anew. A goat is sacrificed in the morning and all the meat is prepared, except for the front legs. They will be given to the blacksmith. Six millet porridge balls are prepared and then put in small black pots. After the meal has been eaten, the wives of the deceased and their children are put on the road and the blacksmith shaves their heads completely. When he has done so, they return home to drink the beer. The blacksmith takes the skin off the goat that has been sacrificed and he gives it to the eldest daughter of the deceased. She puts it into his calabash. She will carry this calabash along with the hat and the lance of her late father and will return home.

One and a half months afterwards, a bit of the everyday millet porridge will be put at a mourner's foot, for which purpose a sort of tiny hut has been constructed. It will be a second son (**ma s l a i**) who does so. For women it is put on the right side, for men on the left side.

The first day, the blacksmith does this offering if it contains meat. If the deceased was a man, he does so at the window's feet and at the last daughter's feet or the second son's. In case of a woman, he would do it at her first daughter's and her youngest son's feet. Afterwards the blacksmith will no longer be needed for these offerings which they can do themselves during the time of mourning.

This time varies. In the case of **Bab-gay Mania**, the final mourning rituals were held nearly one year later. After the first phase of the mourning rituals the wife can go to the brother of her dead husband or find herself another husband.

The end of the mourning period

Tuesday, 10th of April 1989 (more than one year after **Bab-gay Mania's** death): beer has been prepared. In the evening the relatives start to play the flute. Some men pretend to fight, while one man carries the beer pot on his head so that people can drink.

Music is played with all sorts of instruments: flutes, percussion instruments such as **ganzaval** and **dassal**, and the drums. People argue. Pots loaded with beer are taken out of the house and divided and people drink till early in the morning.

Wednesday 11th of April 1989:

this morning only the flute is played. In the afternoon the blacksmith, the brother, the youngest son¹ and the wife of the deceased drink some beer. They have put it in a small pot. They drink under the eaves. They pour out some beer on the ground. The blacksmith says aloud to the dead father, "Take this beer and drink it with your friends and those family members who have died before".

When the evening draws near, they put the meat of a bull on the fire. The blacksmith and the brother and children of the deceased divide it. Had they not been able to find bull meat, they would have taken the skin of a bull, prepared it and pretended it was meat.

Then people leave for the 'bushes', they come back; they leave for the mountains, they come back; they leave to the neighboring compounds, and they come back. By then night has fallen. Everybody returns home. It is the end of the mourning period. For at least two generations sacrifices will be made for the old man.

In christian families, these customs are still transmitted, as explains a woman informant:

"Even my mother who was baptized long ago, tells her children the Mafa customs, but she also tells us that we do not have to live up to all these rules anymore. I will also tell my son when he gets older if I have not forgotten by that time and still remember all the rules".

Now what about the Mafa people who have converted to Islam? Have they forgotten or do they think their former customs are still of importance in their new way of life? The next section will describe a funeral in an Islamized Mafa family. Then Mafa funerals will be analyzed as well as changes after Islamization before coming to conclusions.

¹ Among the Mafa it is the benjamin who will inherit the house of his father. Women will always stay in the house of their youngest sons. The eldest son will stay near the land and build himself a new house. If the father is still alive and the youngest son is old enough to found his own household, the father may build himself a house quite near his old house and stay there with his other wives (whom may be much younger) while the mother of the benjamin stays with her youngest son.

Religious notions and afterlife within the islamic community

The popular notion of Islam within the region contends that there is only one God, Allah: life is in his hands and he knows what people want and need. He has angels to help him, though these do not play a very important role. But *Mysterio*, the soul-eater called *mide* in non-islamic society, remains to be feared and can take the soul away and eat it. Then one gets ill and slowly dies. Protection against *Mysterio* is obtained from the amulets, *layaayi*. These are prescribed by the Qu'ran teacher, *ma l l u m j o*. They are sewn in a pouch of leather and hung around the necks of children, who are especially vulnerable, but adults also wear them.

After death, the soul (*y o n k i*) of a person who has kept strictly to Islamic rules and has led the good life of a Muslim will be taken by the angel, *Malaika Mouwtum* or *Mungarie*, immediately after her or his death. As an informant tells us :

*"When buried, you will be visited by the Prophet, who will say: "Get up, and write down on the white garment they have enwrapped you in what you have done on earth." The hairs on your body will start growing and judge your good and bad deeds during life. Then Allah's guardians make a noise, like the noise of a gun, so you get frightened and return to earth. They come again and bring you a pot to put in bodily fluids in. Then the body is taken to heaven and when you arrive there your soul will be returned to it. You stay in a very large house called *darngal*, which has electricity, and there is a lot of food. God will give you in return all that you have given to your fellow men and women during your lifetime. If you have never given anything to anybody you can eat your own knees once you arrive in *darngal*. There you have to wait for the final judgement (*nyande kiita darngal*) of God. During this judgement which takes place on a very large terrain, people will return to life and get up like termites and God will divide human beings into three groups. A group of Muslims, a group of the people who followed Issa (Jesus) and a group of "Pagans". The members of these groups will each be weighed and thereafter divided into two groups: the good people and the bad people. The good people of each of these groups will go to their own heaven, *saare aljannah*. The bad people will go to hell, *saare yiite* (lit. "the house of fire").*

I jokingly remarked I was hoping visits could be paid to the other heavens as I would like to see my islamic and "pagan" friends again after death. My friend seriously responded that that would not be possible.

*Each territory will be well locked and God's soldiers will keep guard. Their chief is called *zelataodi*. You have to choose in this life. A change of mind in the life hereafter is virtually impossible. You see, the people of Issa think that they are right, that Muslims do not do the things God asks of human beings, so they claim to be the ones who go to Paradise after death. People who do not pray at all [she means who are neither Christians nor Muslims] claim their religion is the only right one. Who is right? Nobody knows for sure. Only Allah knows, because he knows more than any human soul or being. If one does the "right" thing, he will take care of things. There are also people who will say that those "who have just started to pray" [she means have just*

converted] will not go to heaven and get as high a place as the others. Other people claim the contrary is true; that if you have just descended the mountain [this means have come to town] go straight to a Marabout and tell him you would like to pray too, like the Muslims, and the Marabout grants the request washes you and does the necessary prayers, you will get as good a place in heaven as those who have been praying all their lives, even if you die at that very moment. Allah will give those new converts even larger presents than all the other persons. Oh well, we'll find out what it is all like in due time.

Let us now turn to the main features of an Islamic funeral.

Funeral after islamisation

It's early in the morning. We are heading towards the outskirts of town on our way going to the compound of a cousin of the first wife of Baaba Rahmani. That cousin died two days ago; Americans landed that day by helicopter. Without any warning they had come to carry out a project to inoculate children in town. The road to Mokolo is one of the best roads in the country, though not good enough so it seemed for them. The helicopter scared the people in town, nobody knew what was going on and everybody hastened to see what was happening, including the police. In the rush the police car ran over the cousin, who was on his motorbike. The poor guy had been a butcher. He went over to Islam eight years ago. As a butcher you cannot make a decent living if you cannot slaughter in the Islamic way.

We take off our shoes by the entrance hut and pass the men who sit together and mourn in front of as well as inside the first hut. They talk in low voices. We pass them with our heads bent certainly not looking at them. They pretend they did not see us.

We enter the inner courtyard. In one of the huts some women are sitting. They are mourning crying at times while saying aloud, "There is but one God, and Muhammad is his Messenger".

They too converse in low voices. The atmosphere is tense, the poor guy was still young, with a lifetime ahead of him. His mother, who is not Islamized is sitting quietly. Occasionally she wipes a tear from her eyes with a corner of her clothes. People do not dance, they do not sing. The body has been buried. Relatives, friends and people from the Islamic community will regularly drop in during the week following the death. At intervals the men start a prayer, they recite a verse from the Qur'an. The women respond from the inside, by praying too. After we have been sitting for a while, we leave again. We cannot help but pass the men again. While kneeling down, our eyes cast down, we greet them and express our sympathy. Only when we have left the compound, do we put on our shoes again.

Rites of separation

This funeral concerned a Mafa man, who became a muslim eight years before. His family is partly Islamized, partly keeps to their own religion, yet the funeral is totally adapted to Fulbe Islamic customs. When we compare this funeral and the one we described in the introduction, -also a funeral in which Islamized as well as non-Islamized people participated-, we can easily

conclude that funeral practices follow the religion of the deceased. In regard to the Islamic rules this means that the body was buried the same evening at the local burial ground¹.

If it is a man who dies, the Marabout will come to say the prayers. The body will be washed by men. Everybody will start crying and calling aloud. If it is a woman who dies, the body will be washed by a female member of the community. She has to be able to read and write in Arabic, as it is important that prayers are said during the washing ceremony. The body is wrapped in white garments: a skirt, a blouse and a veil for women; trousers, a shirt and veil for men; for both, an additional garment to wrap around the body. When the body is carried outside, women as well as men pray. Then the body will be taken to the place of burial to be buried before sunset. Men will do this job. Even if it concerns a woman's or a child's body, women will not be present. When the body is carried outside and leaves -often by a car that will be hired- the women sit inside and cry and scream aloud. The men take it to the funeral grounds. The body is put near the grave while the men pray standing up. They do not kneel down as they would for the daily prayers, and they pray the special suras. When they have finished praying the Marabout puts the body, which lies on a reed mat without any colors, in a grave, the size of the body. Men, women and children are buried in the same position: the head towards the north, towards Mecca, the holy city. So the face is turned towards the sun. The head of the body will rest on the left hand. The earth is not put directly on the body. They first thatch over the body with wood and leaves so that it becomes "like a house". Only then is sand put in the grave. As the body is buried, prayers are said aloud while the men's faces are turned towards the sun. The women who came to pay a visit will each prepare the meal in turn. They may prepare it at home and then bring it to the house of the deceased. Or they may make it in the kitchen of the compound of the deceased.

Rites of transition

The week afterwards people will pay a visit to the house of the deceased to offer their sympathy to the next of kin and to mourn. All through this period, other women within the Islamic community will prepare the meals. After a week, life goes back to normal for all except the wife or the husband of the deceased and their children.

The total period of mourning will last forty days. During this period, the deceased will visit the next of kin in their dreams at night to give them consolation.

"A man for example can tell his wife what he likes to eat. She prepares it for him. She thinks of him a lot".

During this time a woman should wear the same articles of clothing.

¹ During my last stay, when I again visited a funeral in the mountains with Islamic female friends, I observed that Islamized sons may bury their non-Islamized father the same evening, according to Islamic customs, while the funeral rites are carried out according to Mafa customs.

Rites of reintegration

After forty days people gather again to pray for the deceased. After that period a widow or a widower can marry again.

"By that time the body has rotted in its grave. By that time you also know if a woman is pregnant or not, so who the father is. I mean, if she would marry again too soon you would never know because some children do resemble their fathers but others do not at all".

In the following section the different funeral rites will be analyzed.

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* *

ANALYSIS

The main principle in Mafa society is polarity. Evenness is female and unevenness is male, which can be seen in some parts of the funeral rituals. The first son represents the male, he dances with the bow with a rope, the second son dances with the bow without a rope, as he represents the female.

Meat, especially for sacrifices and ritual purpose, is always prepared by men. Vegetable sauces and millet porridge are prepared by women. For boys the umbilical cord is cut either with wild grasses or with an iron object; for girls, with a millet straw. The house is associated with men; they guard the entrance. But the deapest inside of the house (the kitchen) is associated with women. Whenever a woman and her husband have a fight, she can beat on him as long as they are in her domain: the kitchen or the fields.

However, these two poles of Mafa classification must not be viewed upon as opposed and mutually exclusive spheres. They are systematically interrelated and are part of an ideological whole.

The following diagrams underline the main ordering principles in Mafa society.

Cosmological world God : <i>Jigile</i> (Ultimate being) and his tutelary spirit (<i>guid-pat</i>)		
<u>human</u> order (cultivation) human being - <i>mide</i> (soul-eater) two (person and <i>guid-pad</i>)	<u>half human</u> disorder (mist) twins (<i>tsakalay</i>) two and four (twins and <i>tsakalay</i>)	<u>not human</u> disorder (bushes) gods, spirits water spirits

human beings	
<u>masculinity</u> . uneven (three) . left . war . death (Burial and forge (iron) by men of blacksmith caste) . meat . wild grasses . first daughter house	<u>femininity</u> . even (two) . right . life (midwife and potters (earth) by women of blacksmith caste) . vegetables . millet . second son fields/kitchen

During the funeral rites many inversions of the cosmological order took place. For example men are buried after two (feminine) days and women after three (masculine) days.

When the deceased man is taken out of the house to make his last rounds, he is set on the right side of the entrance hut, a place reserved for women in ordinary situations. Further, a woman is buried on her left side, a man on his right side. Things that are normally forbidden, like walking around the compound or taking straws out of the hut to light the fire, can now be done. And in some areas to pay the last visit one cannot leave by the door: a hole should be made in the wall of the hut to make the body leave. To explain the significance of these reversals, we may point out that in many African societies the spirit of the dead persons has to be led astray. By doing so they hope he will not return to the living world to bother the next of kin and other relations.

These reversals of the classifying principles are summarized in the following scheme:

separation	transition	reintegration
walk around hut no normal entrance millet meal with vegetables (feminine)	straw from roof millet meal with vegetables (feminine)	meat of bull (masculine)
<u>feminine</u> <u>masculine</u>	<u>feminine</u> <u>masculine</u>	<u>feminine</u> <u>masculine</u>
left right uneven even (two)	left right uneven even (two) sacrificial drinking	right left even(two) uneven sacrificial drinking
<u>music instruments</u>		
drums singing dancing with belongings	drums and percussion singing dancing with belongings	flute and percussion fighting
<u>trees used</u>		
<i>wum</i> (buried)	<i>wum</i> (string with potsherd baba)	
<i>wandar</i> (burnt)	<i>calcedra</i> (burnt)	<i>ga'agd</i> (burnt)

The reversals concerning left and right, and even and uneven are obvious in the rites of separation and transition. During the rites of reintegration the normal order is restored, which respectively means, right and left, even and uneven associated with female and male.

The significance of the musical instruments still has to be analyzed. For example in the rainy seasons, the drums (or certain drums) cannot be used. The iron percussion instruments used during the rites of integration are only used by men. The flute is never played by women. Further research is also needed concerning the significance of the different trees and their functions. At this point no conclusions can be drawn on these subjects.

In regard to the changes that took place after Islamization, we can conclude that the cosmology and the symbols attached to it have changed drastically.

Islam has a linear view of life and the after-life. Everything lies the hands of Allah, demands are made directly upon him and the ancestors no longer play a role. People go to heaven or hell after this life and continue to live for ever after. The non-Islamized Mafa, on the contrary, take a more circular view; they re-incarnate in a next-life.

It should be clear that Mafa cosmology is not based on a dualistic pattern whereby humans are found on one level with non-humans or spirits and above them the Supreme Being. It is more like a continuum, not in the form of a circle but more like a spiral, as one gets deeper underneath the earth after every death. At the same time, in Mafa religion, Jigile, the Ultimate Being, and the human beings have a common feature. They are both double beings (the person or God and his or her tutelary spirit), yet they are different. Within Islamic society it is clear that Allah has no similarity to mortal human beings.

In Mafa religion the difference between God and the Humans is bridged by the lesser spirits. They are tutelary spirits and small gods, who are of the same order, yet different. The tutelary spirits are double and related to humans, whereas the small gods are single and not related. In Islamic religion, the angels are helpers of God, but they have no intermediary function, as one can only pray directly to God. In the Mafa cosmological system, a person and a *mide* are opposite - ordinary and evil - beings, yet both humans.

After Islamization, this remains the same, but the clear associations related to male and female other than the inside - outside dichotomy, no longer play a role within the Islamic community. At their funeral rites the obvious reversals that existed during Mafa rituals have disappeared. The rites are sober. People only pray; they no longer dance or sing. How can these enormous changes be understood?

CONCLUSIONS

Thomas noted that in Africa death is not an end in itself:

"qui clot une durée de vie inscrite sur un temps linéaire, mais un moment du temps circulaire, répétitif, codifié par ce référentiel capital que constitue le mythe et contrôlé par les ancêtres dont les patriarches sont ici-bas les représentants" (1982:12).

Mafa non-Islamic society is obviously a patriarchal society. Its cosmology demonstrates the importance of femininity. However on an 'overt' level women are subordinated to men. Mafa women can be considered to be the key to Mafa cosmology (Boisseau and Soula 1974). The sacred aspects of this society are related to femininity. But the mother's patri-kin remain important and their presence during the funeral also points to intertwined power relations between the genders. Within the Islamic community these equal balances between the genders on two levels has disappeared.

In funeral rituals, there is a major difference between Mafa and Islamic ideology. Mafa religion takes a circular view of the universal, Islam has a linear view of life and the afterlife. After adopting Islam something fundamentally changes: the ancestors no longer control life; all is in the hands of Allah. Now of course people object that Allah is the same as the Gods of the non-Muslims, Jigile. Yet demands made to Jigile always pass by the area gods, while demands to Allah are made directly. Within the Islamic community, the dead go to Allah to be judged and then either to paradise or hell; they do not return to earth or live on underneath as they do in the non-Islamic community. So the ancestors no longer play a role, one need no longer take them into account. The intermediary functions of the small gods also disappear, so sacrifices to them need no longer be made. Soul-eaters still need to be watched, but protection against them comes from Allah and no longer from the tutelary-spirit. Belief in the water spirits also remain after Islamization, though they do not play a very dominant role. We pointed out the important role of twins and the importance of the number two. After adoption of Islam people still believe twins have special gifts and that their demands could be granted, if not, they can easily turn their parents blind or cause madness. But contrarily to the non-Islamic community they have become human. In the Islamic community it is their father who is the pro-creator. The change in cosmological ideas leads to a change in funeral rites. The spirit of the dead person no longer needs to be led astray, as it leaves to Allah directly.

By connecting the funeral rites with the belief system of the Mafa before and after Islamization, one better understands what changes within funeral rituals and why. Yet it is remarkable that such drastic changes occur within a relatively short period. Besides practical reasons, there are more ideological ones. For the old lady cited below the prospect of Paradise, i.e. the prospect of linearity is the attractive aspect of Islam:

"I am still doing the sacrifices for my father and mother in the jars called baba and mama

Now you see every rainy season I think: "next year I will convert, because you see, by now all my children have converted and I would very much like to live on for ever after and be with them instead of having to die five times and be gone for ever. But then the rainy season passes and the dry season comes and there is always so much work to do. Time flies and I realize another year has passed and I still am doing my sacrifices... Oh well, but I will convert... sometime, maybe next year."

But she did not yet want to leave her responsibilities for the sacrifices for baba and mama.

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