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## Dressing at Death: Haya Adornment and Temporality

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CLOTHING

AND

DIFFERENCE



EDITED BY

HILDI

HENDRICKSON

EMBODIED IDENTITIES IN COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

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AND DIFFERENCE

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Post-Colonial Africa

Edited by **HILDI HENDRICKSON**



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## 5 DRESSING AT DEATH: CLOTHING, TIME, AND MEMORY IN BUHAYA, TANZANIA

Brad Weiss



Discussions of the relation between memory and objects often focus on the creation of specialized mnemonic forms. This has been true particularly of discussions of clothing (Weiner 1992; Weiner and Schneider 1989), which emphasize the capacity of sacralized heirlooms to preserve continuities across time and space, and thereby provide a means of remembering. While such analyses do draw our attention to the ways in which particular objects become imbued with vital aspects of social identity, they run the risk of overemphasizing the material substance of such objects at the expense of analytic interest in the broader sociocultural problems that create them. At the same time, an exclusive interest in the creation of long-term continuities through the use of mnemonic forms diverts attention away from the crucial role that *forgetting* may play in the sociocultural construction of temporality. In spite of the dichotomy commonly drawn between these processes, forgetting need not be merely an ineffective attempt to retain information or an unintended consequence of the production of new forms of knowledge. Rather, in some instances, forgetting can be seen as an intentional and purposive attempt to create absences that can be crucial to the reconstruction and revaluation of social meanings and relations (Lass 1988, Derrida 1986, Battaglia 1992). I suggest that Haya mortuary practices are one such instance, and that clothing and adornment in particular play a crucial part in the conjoined processes of remembering and forgetting that are occasioned by death.

During my fieldwork with Haya communities in the Kagera region of north-west Tanzania,<sup>1</sup> I was frequently absorbed in the project of trying to understand the wide-reaching implications of death as a sociocultural problem in this area. I was especially interested in the concreteness and specific detail of mortuary and mourning practices that mediate experiences of death for the Haya. Their use of cloth and clothing of different kinds is very important to Haya mortuary



practices, as it is to many peoples; moreover, important transformations in the various uses of clothing in this context can be traced over time. The implications of these practices and their transformations, I suggest, raise a series of questions that turn on the relation between persons and objects, continuity and discontinuity, as well as the living and the dead. The analysis I propose here, therefore, is not restricted to a discussion of the uses and meanings of mortuary cloth and clothing, but rather employs such activities as exemplifications of wider cultural themes and processes objectified in the relation between clothing, time, and memory.

### *Effigies and Heirlooms*

Just over one million Haya live in the Kagera region, located in the northwest of Tanzania. The Haya form a part of the Interlacustrine sociocultural area, which includes (among others) the Ganda and Nyoro in Uganda to the north, as well as the indigenes of Rwanda and Burundi to the west and southwest. Haya villages (*ekyaro*, singular) in the rural areas of Kagera, the primary site of the research on which this essay is based, are composed of a number of family farms (*ekibanja*, singular). These farms are also places of residence, and all households occupy farmland. All the farms within a village lie immediately adjacent to one another, so the village as a whole is a contiguous group of households on perennially cultivated land. These residential villages are dispersed across and clearly contrast with open grassland (*orweya*). The primary produce of Haya family farms are perennial tree crops; bananas, which provide the edible staple; and coffee, which provides the principal source of money. Coffee remains the most significant source of a rapidly declining cash income in Kagera today, and this cash is filtered through the Haya community in an informal economy (*biashara ndogo ndogo* in Swahili) of marketing local produce, household commodities, and (most importantly for these analyses) new and used textiles and clothing at local weekly markets.

Let me begin this discussion of Haya dressing practices by addressing certain historical shifts in the use of different kinds of cloth, and explore in particular the temporal forms that clothing realizes and makes tangible over this history. According to ethnographic reports on Buhaya from the earliest decade of this century (Cesard 1937), all of the deceased's clothing was once destroyed as a part of funeral procedures. Indeed, a wide range of objects owned by the deceased, from pots and plates to gourds and even house posts, were destroyed. The central exception to this practice in the case of a male household head was a single animal skin. This skin was used in the installation ceremony that fol-

lowed the burial, as the heir assumed his senior position by sitting in the chair of the former head and wearing his inherited skin.

In northwest Tanzania in the late 1980s, this array of objects belonging to the deceased, including clothing, is preserved; in fact, my neighbors suggested to me that it would be especially shameful to destroy the possessions of one's dead relatives since these are the principal source of wealth for descendant generations. What is just as important, however, is the fact that the single item of clothing most strongly identified with the household head (my neighbors usually referred to the coat or the *kansu*<sup>2</sup> of a man) is used in the installation process in precisely the same way as the animal skin described earlier. Thus in spite of the shifting relations between persons and objects over the course of Haya history, clothing continues to be a critical medium for articulating descent, and especially for objectifying identifications between the authority of the living and the dead.

There is another intermediate position that clothing occupies, intermediate to both the order of mortuary practices and descent relations, which is worth addressing in order to assess what seems to be the importance of clothing in the construction of symbolic and social authority. Before an heir is installed, the coat or other item of clothing that will mark his ascendance is used by the grandchildren of the deceased for a very different purpose. This generation takes the coat and either creates an effigy of the dead grandfather with it, or dresses up in imitation of him, parading around the village and demanding payment for their performance. In either case, my Haya friends said that this display, which is always received as fairly hilarious, is intended to suggest that the deceased is not actually dead, but is still around and able to make demands of his children.

The Haya call this kind of display "joking" (*okusilibya*) and it is consistent with the character of relations between grandparents and grandchildren during their lives. These alternate generations are, to begin with, *equivalent* in important respects. For example, while marriage with a member of one's mother's and certainly father's clan is strictly prohibited, Haya prefer to marry members of their grandparents' clan.<sup>3</sup> Thus, grandfathers call granddaughters "my wife" and grandmothers call grandsons "my husband." It is appropriate, then, that grandchildren should replicate their grandparents at their death, since, as we shall see in important respects, they *are* their grandparents.

At the same time, it is important to understand why this activity is not just imitation, but joking, and how this joking works. And our understanding turns on the meanings of the clothing through which this activity is achieved. Remember that the same clothing that is used to install an heir in the place of his

elder is used to *recreate* that elder through imitation. Here, again, we see that clothing contributes simultaneously to processes of remembering *and* forgetting, for it is only by completely forgetting the “actual” deceased person, as well as the variety of forms that are intended to recreate him, that a memory of the deceased can be reconstructed. The authority vested in the new household head is not an imitation of former authorities, but an instantiation within a continuous as well as individuated set of temporally ordered social relations. Clothing mediates both of these dimensions, reciprocally forgetting and memorializing the dead.

What’s more, the imitation of the elder by the youngest generation is actually a means of undermining the authority to which the ascendant generation aspires. For if the deceased is still present, even in this mock form, no heir can assume his place. Grandchildren recognize the irony that is involved in joking as well as the power that is at stake in these actions, for it is they who will be subjected to the final authority of their parents when they assume this position. Thus, as a friend of mine told me, “We joke with our dead grandfathers in order to bother our fathers!”

These activities reveal the ways in which clothing is central to the coordination of intergenerational relations. The basic form of senior-to-junior hierarchy is embedded in the inherited garment, which insures not only the continuity of descent but the *reproduction* of its *authority*, as ascendant generations assume greater power over their own juniors. At the same time, grandchildren are able to appropriate this very same item in order to assert a very different kind of identification with the authority of senior generations. Through their joking and by means of the same clothing that embodies the power of descent, juniors are also suggesting that the nature of authority is grounded, not simply in the relation of seniors to juniors, or parents to children, but in the ongoing reproduction of generations over time. The authority exercised in descent relations does not lie in a dyadic relation but in generative relations. This joking, then, demonstrates that the authority that seniors exercise over juniors ultimately derives from the relation between generations and will inevitably be assumed by these juniors themselves.

These acts, I am suggesting, instantiate different aspects of identity and, consequently, constitute different forms of power. Sons can assert their equivalence to their grandfathers, thereby suggesting that the power of their own fathers is circumscribed by the passage of time. But these fathers assume their positions as household heads by the same actions, and so achieve an authoritative identity. Fathers, in these situations, do not become “the same as” their own fathers. Rather, they become elders in their own right who command a



more complete authority over their sons as an aspect of their own, as clearly distinguished from the deceased's, identity.

Clothing, it seems to me, is an especially appropriate vehicle for representing these alternative forms of identity and authority. Put simply, in these contexts a garment can be worn as both an heirloom and a costume. That is, a coat can be worn as an heirloom in order to represent the values that attend to a certain position, or it can be worn as a costume in order to imitate particular figures who occupy these positions. When a father wears a coat imbued with such generational, temporal values, his body is placed in a position identical to others who have worn it. Yet, precisely because wearing clothing both displays and conceals the body, the possibility for imitation and disguise is also introduced. Thus, grandchildren claim not that they occupy the same position as their grandfathers, but that they recreate the same bodies as these elders. In this shifting relation between bodies and clothing, heirlooms and costumes, representation and imitation, shifts made possible in these contexts by the use of clothing itself, we see the construction of alternative models of hierarchy and authority, as well as continuity and discontinuity over time.

### *The Ironies of Secondhand Style*

The former destruction of personal clothing as opposed to its contemporary preservation exemplifies one significant historical change in Haya understandings of the relation of persons to clothing, and especially to the clothing of the dead. And there is another, in some ways more obvious change in Haya "fashion" that requires some explanation. Moreover, it is a change that helps illuminate the place of clothing in the construction of time and memory in these communities. The uses of clothing and other beautification techniques I describe below are clearly historical practices—animal skins have been replaced by coats and *kansu*, bodies once beautified by butter are now adorned with petroleum-based oils. Clearly, these commodities are cultural imports; but clothing in the Haya world has long been a means of relating local communities to other places. In the nineteenth century, Haya merchants traded coffee berries prepared for chewing in order to acquire the finest bark cloth pieces from Buganda. When money was to be made in the 1920s, this time from the *sale* of coffee on the world market, it was reported that the Haya used their profits to procure European finery. As one district commissioner at the time put it: "It is delightful to see well dressed Africans who have given up their skins and rags" (Bakengesa 1974, 20).

In the late 1980s, European clothing of a different sort was available in lo-

cal markets. Both men's and women's clothing—especially coats, shirts, and dresses—were made available as church and development agencies airlifted containers of used clothing into the region, which local entrepreneurs then sold at weekly markets (cf. Hansen 1994; Comaroff n.d.). Tailors and a very few seamstresses also commonly prepared suits and skirts from bolts of fabric, but this locally made clothing, while cut in a similar “style,” was clearly distinguished from used European clothing. This used, imported clothing is called, in the vernacular, *Kafa Ulaya*—literally “Died in Europe.” My friends’ exegeses indicated that this term meant that “someone has died in Europe, and we get their clothes!” In other parts of Tanzania, I have been told, a common slang insult is *Kafe Ulaya*, “Drop dead in Europe!” In this case, the implication of the insult is not just that the insulted party should die, but that they should die in Europe, where they will surely come back to Tanzania in the form of spare parts. At least then they will be good for something!

These bits of jargon, though they may seem fragmentary, clearly speak to Tanzanians’ own sense of themselves as parts of a global order of property relations and values. But it is worth noting, especially with regard to the Haya example, that this form of popular consciousness is expressed in terms of what we have already seen to be a powerful set of relations between clothing and death. In this case, we see again the ways in which clothing concretizes the transformations introduced at times of death; and more importantly, we see the way in which encompassing questions of continuity and discontinuity, of integration into a wider world of circulating commodities, as well as one’s marginality to this same world, are engaged through the medium of clothing. And this is a medium which, in the context of temporal transitions like death, is able to objectify the irony of this situation. Indeed, wearing *Kafa Ulaya* has the potential for many of the same deceptions and conceits as making an effigy of the dead. I often heard men who (in the view of their neighbors) thought too highly of themselves lampooned for “wrapping on a tie” or “putting on a coat.” Other items associated with European dress, like brimmed hats and eyeglasses, might also be dismissed as simply the trappings of those who aspire to refinement. Of course, the ability to wear such items *and* command the respect of those who see you wear them is a widespread ambition. As in the case of effigies and heirlooms, those who create a “successful” appearance are those who project an identification with the objects they deploy, while the very *same* objects can also be taken as signs of mere pretension. Styles of adornment such as these, therefore, capture the sense of both an appreciation of the values handed down via pieces of used clothing and the prestige that many Tanzanians themselves attribute to possessing such garments, as well as a recognition of the



indifference, if not disdain, with which these items are made hand-me-downs by Europeans. Again like the use of heirlooms to create effigies, such items objectify and comment on relations of authority at an extremely wide level. In this context, clothing places those who wear it in a position of both belonging to and being cast off from an encompassing world of property and values.

### *The Affinities of Bark Cloth*

Continuities, as well as discontinuities between the living and the dead are revealed not only by the trajectories of “inherited” garments such as heirlooms or *Kafa Ulaya* but by the clothing in which Haya men and women inter their dead. Funerary shrouds establish important social ties in the context of mortuary relations. The ways in which they are purchased, wrapped, preserved, and ultimately undone concretize and make meaningful a host of relationships. The use of shrouds as memorials demonstrates the ways in which memories are given tangible form, as well as the fact that the necessity of securing memories can be *anticipated* and acted upon. Securing a memorial can, in many instances, provide a basis of *sociality* in Haya men’s and women’s lives, and the control and disposition of clothing gives evidence of this critical sociocultural process.

The cloth in which corpses are buried is known as an *enzikyo* (from *okuzikya*, “to cause to be buried”) or *ekilago* (from *okulaga*, “to sleep”). Until the middle of this century (Sundkler 1974, 70) the material used for these shrouds was bark cloth (*orubugu*, cut from the ficus tree, *omubugu*). Bark cloth was once an important trade good in the Interlacustrine region (Hartwig 1976). This cloth was cut and prepared in the Haya kingdoms and traded north into the kingdoms of Bunyoro and Buganda. During the nineteenth century, control over the bark cloth trade was carefully regulated by Haya monarchs, and in the late 1980s I found many bark cloth trees growing prominently on what were once royal lands.

When bark cloth was used as a shroud, the corpse was first dressed in everyday clothing (Cesard 1937; Sundkler 1974, 70) and then wrapped in bark cloth. Bark cloth was not only used to wrap the corpse but was also worn as signs of mourning by clansmen of the deceased. The sections of bark cloth that provided shrouds were generally quite large (perhaps two by three meters square), and these mourning cloaks were in fact cut from the same cloth that served to wrap the corpse. *Okujwala olubugu*, “to wear bark cloth,” is still a term that is synonymous with *okufelwa*, “to be in mourning.” This use of bark cloth suggests, therefore, a powerful means of asserting an identification of the living



with the dead, as not only the same material but the very same cloth was used both to shroud the dead and to clothe the mourners.

While some bark cloth is still produced in northwest Tanzania, it is no longer as widely available as it once was. Funeral shrouds, with perhaps a few exceptions, are no longer prepared from bark cloth; however, there are some important continuities in Haya mourning styles that give evidence of an ongoing concern with the use of clothing to mediate relations between the living and the dead. In some parts of Kagera, especially in the northern region of Kiziba, men and women in mourning wear printed textiles called *kanga* and *kitenge*,<sup>4</sup> which are everyday women's clothing throughout East Africa, draped around their necks. This practice, which is followed for a few weeks following the burial of a clansman, is still called "to wear bark cloth" in spite of the different materials used today. In other areas, men and women do not wear textiles in this way, but women continue to wear sections of cloth cut from the funeral shroud itself (now made of a white broadcloth known as *Merikani* for its American origins) as a sign of mourning. In spite of a change in textiles, then, shrouds continue to establish links between the living and the dead.

The connections between the living and the dead confirmed through bark cloth and contemporary burial cloth can also be seen to be closely related to material relations between living generations, as well as affinal relatives. According to all of my informants, the *Merikani* now used throughout Kagera to provide funeral shrouds should always be purchased by the spouses of the deceased's children. Those who marry your children, both your daughters' husbands and your sons' wives, can be expected to provide you with funeral shrouds upon your death, and corpses therefore are often wrapped in several layers of burial cloth. Thus, it might be said that such shrouds, which fashion critical links between the living and the dead, also embody an important connection between children and their parents. Parents are dependent on their children to clothe them in the funeral shrouds that will provide the connection between these same generations after death. Moreover, this obligation to clothe the dead is widely recognized as a crucial dimension of intergenerational relationships. Haya men and women often described to me the burden and tragedy of not having children in terms of this obligation and its consequences; as one man put it, "If I don't have children, who will bring funeral shrouds?" Children, then, are not only expected to care for their parents in their old age, but the value of this care takes on its greatest significance at a parent's death. Indeed, a person's relationship with his or her children is often expressly *motivated* by concerns about their own death and funeral, and these concerns are concretized and enacted through the gift of burial cloth.

It is especially important that this relationship between generations becomes fully realized through affinal connections. Children's obligations to their parents at death are actually made possible by their marital relations, since funeral shrouds are purchased by the spouse of one's offspring. This connection between affinity and mortuary, a connection that is instantiated in funeral shrouds, raises a number of points about the ways in which clothing organizes and orients Haya social relations. To begin with, the explicit relationship between one's own death and the having of children—or, to be more specific, the *marriage* of one's children—indicates the close associations between mortality and reproduction, a phenomenon recognized as an aspect of mortuary procedures in an extremely wide range of contexts (Bloch and Parry 1982). In Haya mortuary practices, funeral shrouds do more than simply demonstrate this crucial connection, they establish the relevance of marriage to death by revealing the ways in which the *trajectories* of these productive social relations—that is, the processes of constructing, undoing, and reconstructing these relations as they unfold over time—implicate each other. In effect, death is widely recognized as *the* occasion toward and through which a diverse array of Haya social relations are oriented: parents have children in order to ensure their proper death, parents secure marriages for their children in order to commemorate their own burials, and spouses fulfill their obligations to one another at their in-laws' funerals. These gifts of burial shrouds, then, have to be understood and assessed in terms of the coordination of practices and relations achieved at death.

### *Death and Bridewealth*

If we consider death as a point of orientation in the development of many Haya relationships, we can discern some interesting temporal qualities embedded in the gifts of cloth that instantiate this process. The link of burial cloths to affines, for example, suggests the connection of death to bridewealth. Haya bride-wealth, *amakula*, not only allows for the acquisition of important material goods into a bride's family at the time surrounding her marriage, it also ensures the incorporation of extended networks of relations into one's mourning party. The cloth or clothing that is always a central feature of the contributions offered by daughters' husbands, husbands' siblings, as well as their children at the funeral of an ascendant affine might therefore be considered the completion or fulfillment of bridewealth payments. In this respect, Haya marriages and the expectation of ongoing marriage payments anticipate and prepare for the death of one's parent.



These temporal qualities—the ways in which gifts, especially gifts of clothing, can anticipate an event or process—can also be seen in the kinds of objects that are given as bridewealth at the time of marriage. Haya bridewealth payments and prestations have changed considerably in both degree and kind over the last century. New forms of marriage—especially marriages given “official” recognition by both religious and State agencies<sup>5</sup>—have arisen and have greatly expanded the field of possible marital arrangements. They have also extended the strategies for providing bridewealth to recognize and secure such arrangements. However, in spite of this diversity, most Haya men and women with whom I spoke held that certain payments *had* to be made in order for a marriage to be recognized as such; and among the most important gifts that had to accompany any marriage were items of cloth, namely blankets and sheets for the mother (and often the mother’s sisters, and their mother, as well) of the bride.

These gifts of cloth at marriage parallel the gifts of shrouds at death, each of which is provided by a daughter’s affines. Until factory manufactured textiles became widely available in the region, the blankets (*blanketi*) and sheets (*mashuka*) offered to a bride’s matrikin were made from bark cloth, just as funeral shrouds were. But, in addition to these noteworthy similarities in materials, these gifts of cloth constructed, and continue to construct, complementary ways of organizing the temporal patterns of social processes (e.g., their sequencing, duration, repetition, origination, and conclusion) as well as specific experiences of these temporal patterns (e.g., anticipation, recollection, foreshadowing, or forgetting)—that is, the objects exchanged contribute to the generation of complementary *temporal orientations*.<sup>6</sup> For example, Haya men and women told me that blankets and sheets are given to a bride’s mother(s) as bridewealth in order to replace the many blankets and sheets that the new wife had undoubtedly soiled as a child herself. These gifts of cloth (which are, in fact, explicitly forms of *clothing*, since they clothe an infant) are, therefore, intended to recognize the (specifically women’s) work involved in raising a child. They acknowledge and *recall* the mothers’ contributions to the development of the donor’s bride. Indeed, according to all of my informants, the “things” (*ebintu*) of bridewealth, from the beer and goats specifically intended for senior male members of the bride’s clan to the cash gifts that today accompany any marriage, are given as tokens of thanks and appreciation for having raised a daughter well. These sentiments are significant, for they indicate that rather than serving as compensation for the loss of future services that a daughter might provide or as possible resources that might be drawn on by her brothers for their future marriages (Comaroff 1980, 167), Haya bridewealth prestations are

oriented toward the *prior* activities of raising a daughter that make a marriage possible. In fact, the term for bridewealth, *amakula*, derives from the verb *okukula*, “to mature or develop.” Such terminology suggests not only that these offerings are able to make a mature woman out of a girl, but that bridewealth recognizes and gives thanks for the process of *maturing* a girl for marriage.

Any offering can be presented or received as a gesture of thanks, a token that acknowledges the efforts made by the bride’s natal family, efforts that ultimately will benefit her marital relations. But what is especially significant about the gift of blankets and sheets in this context is that they not only thank the bride’s matrikin for their acts of nurturance, they also are intended specifically to replace a set of similar objects that were used up in the course of these activities. Through this replacement, then, these gifts of cloth provide a means of *remembering* the very concrete practices, including the bodily connections of the mother and the bride to the clothing itself, through which the bride was cared for and (ultimately) made ready for marriage. Moreover, by evoking and incorporating the memory of these maternal activities and objects into the marriage process itself, these gifts of cloth might be said to reconfigure their significance in some important respects. Replacing the worn-out blankets and sheets of child-rearing with new ones at the time of marriage connects these life events into a cohesive process. These gifts establish a specific *orientation* to the acts and objects of raising a child, by demonstrating that caring for a daughter *anticipates* her future marriage, itself an event that may explicitly anticipate a future gift of cloth, the funeral shroud.

What is important, then, is that these marital gifts of cloth work to create specific sorts of memories, making material recollections of raising a daughter an aspect of her readiness to be married as a woman. These gifts also give a definitive temporal orientation to the acts of child-rearing and to the qualities characteristic of parents’ relations with their children. The blankets and sheets of bridewealth, then, operate in ways that complement the use and provision of funeral shrouds. All these forms of clothing the body (whether of infants, or corpses and mourners) invoke memories, in particular, memories that are features of intergenerational relations. Similarly, the different uses of these kinds of clothing can fulfill expectations or anticipated outcomes—in some cases, even anticipated memorials. Parents may have children in anticipation of the provision of a burial shroud that will ensure their memorialization at death. At marriage, memories of child care invoked by blankets and sheets may cause those actions to be seen as anticipations of that child’s maturation and preparation for marriage. Clothing, and the exchange of particular kinds of clothing, it seems, can be seen as crucial media for embedding not just temporal modes of



continuities and discontinuities but the experiential qualities of memory, recollection, and anticipation into the very forms of Haya sociality.

### *Time and Adornment*

These gifts and practices demonstrate the capacity of clothing to forge and reconfigure critical temporal features of Haya sociality. I have argued that generational as well as affinal relations are felt to develop over time and are often oriented toward specific events or sequences of events—especially death and marriage, each of which must be addressed as a process in the Haya context. Clothing, perhaps more than any other material medium or item, is the vehicle through which these temporal orientations are concretized. In the passage from generation to generation, from natal kin to marital relations, and from life to death, Haya clothing works to recall certain prior experiences and aspects of identity and to anticipate the fulfillment of others. The question that these capacities provokes is, why clothing? Why is it that clothing seems to be so central to these dynamic dimensions of Haya social process? While it may not be possible to give a definitive answer to this question (that is, one that accounts for the privileged position of clothing *as opposed to* any other available item), it does seem important to address this problem by examining the significance of Haya practices of *wearing* clothing. A Haya aesthetics of adornment (especially mortuary adornment), a consideration of the qualities generated and conveyed both by wearing particular kinds of clothing in particular ways as well as by treating and preparing the body through a variety of techniques so as to produce an appropriate appearance, can tell us a great deal about Haya men's and women's emphasis on clothing in the construction of memory.

Mourners at a Haya funeral, especially those who consider themselves close relatives of the deceased, are generally rather unkempt. As many men and women told me, those in mourning are so preoccupied (*baina ebitekelezo*, literally "they have thoughts/concerns") by their grief that they care little for maintaining a neat appearance. But this apparent lack of careful grooming actually has a persistent aesthetic form. It is women, especially, who take special care to present what we might call a proper mourning appearance. Haya women are generally said to express their feelings more readily than men (as men, I was often told, are "harder," *nibaguma*, than women), and women's physical semblance and comportment is a central means of this expression. When women come to a funeral they almost always present a distinct bearing. As they make their way to the house where the deceased is to be buried, women mourners wail with grief (*obushasi*, literally "pain" or "bitterness"), firmly

clasping their hands to the sides of their heads as they cry. Women told me that they hold their heads in this way because they are "so full of thoughts" that it feels as though their heads may split open. After a woman has greeted the mourners at the funeral and cried over the corpse, she will often wear a long, narrow strip of banana bast tied around her head until the deceased has been buried. This strip of bast is not only taken as a sign of mourning but, like a woman's hands clasped to her head, is also intended to restrict the uncontrollable expansion of her "thoughts."

These forms of bodily comportment, holding and even tying the head to control the afflictions of grief, reveal a concern with unbridled dispersal and dissolution. The integrity and closure of the mourner's body are threatened by the death of a relative (however that may be defined), and this threat is manifest most clearly in the physical appearance of mourning women. These aesthetics of mourning are further suggested by the way in which women dress to attend a funeral. In everyday contexts other than funerals, Haya women, especially married women, generally wear two large printed textiles, the previously mentioned *kanga* or *kitenge* (called *ekikongo* in Oluhaya). One piece of cloth is wrapped around a woman's waist, and the second piece is draped over both shoulders; occasionally the second piece is pulled up to cover her head, as well. This style of dress was often explicitly described to me as a way of properly "closing" a woman. Young men and women also suggested that a woman (especially a married woman) who did not drape herself in this way when greeting other men or women<sup>7</sup> would be seen as especially aggressive, perhaps even sexually suggestive, in her attire. Through this style of dress, then, women create an appearance of enclosure that suggests personal restraint. Yet, in clear contrast to this style, Haya women attend funerals wearing only one such cloth, which they wrap tightly across their breasts. Like clasping her hands to the sides of her head as she cries, wearing this single cloth while leaving her shoulders and upper body virtually uncovered, conveys a sense of a women's exposure and dissolution that is characteristic of this aesthetic.

This sense of exposure and dispersal, demonstrated so remarkably by Haya women's style of dress and comportment, is a critical feature of the mortuary process. I also suggest that these adornment practices reveal further aspects of the importance of clothing in generating and configuring Haya memories. It is significant that the appearance of dissolution embodied by women is part of the *initial* response to death. Gradually, these exposed forms are enclosed, and the dissolute is made coherent in the course of the mortuary process. For example, a woman's shift from clasping the sides of her head with her hands, her elbows akimbo, frequently trembling with sorrow, during the procession to



the funeral to tying a strip of banana bast around her head prior to the burial of the deceased is an attenuated form of this reintegration and composure that the mortuary process attempts to achieve. It should also be pointed out that banana bast fiber (*ebyhai*) was at one time used to construct what I was told were not very prestigious forms of clothing (Cesard 1937), usually simple short skirts generally worn by those who did not have access to finer skins or bark cloth pieces. In any event, this use of bast strips at funerals might be taken as evidence of the significance of *clothing* (since surely the bast tied around her head is *worn* by a woman in mourning) in reestablishing the bodily integrity and composure threatened by death.

If we consider the significance of clothing in terms of the qualities of enclosure and integrity, qualities that are basic features of a Haya aesthetic, then we can begin to assess the importance of clothing as a medium for constructing temporal continuities and discontinuities, especially in the context of death. Bark cloth pieces, which once provided funeral shrouds and also had strips cut from it that were worn as signs of mourning, display these qualities in many respects. When people talked to me about the virtues of bark cloth (even bark cloth pieces produced in the current day), they emphasized how large these pieces were in contrast to standard cotton sheets that were sold at the market. The methods for producing large pieces of bark cloth, such as those once used for shrouds, bear an interesting relation to these aesthetic criteria. Bark was stripped from the *omubugu* ficus in single sections and then pounded with a grooved mallet over a period of several hours, sometimes even a few days. Cesard reports that from a strip of bark measuring 1 by 0.2 meters, a sheet of bark cloth measuring 3 or 4 meters by 1.2 to 1.5 meters could be produced (Cesard 1937, 107). This vigorous pounding resulted in cloth that could be not only quite large but also extremely supple.<sup>8</sup>

The aesthetic concern with creating a cohesive and integrated appearance, a concern that attempts to refashion the expansive disintegration that begins the mortuary process, can be seen to be embedded in the form of bark cloth. As these production techniques indicate, large sheets of bark cloth, which will eventually clothe both the deceased and those who mourn, present a seamless whole. Rather than composing a cloak from separate elements that can be fastened together (as might be the case for fiber skirts, animal skin belts, or contemporary suit jackets and house dresses) the bark cloth artisan creates an uninterrupted form, a single and singular piece that embodies the kind of coherence that funerary practices and aesthetics seek to establish. This seamless shroud not only draws attention to the identification of mourners with the deceased (as it emphasizes the fact that both are clothed not only with the same

type of cloth but with sheets of cloth that are separated from a single, unitary piece); it also creates the aesthetic form of coherence across the surface of the enclosed (enclothed) corpse. That is, the form of seamless integrity embedded in the bark cloth shrouds becomes iconic of the processes through which it is both manufactured and worn.

### *Temporal Surfaces*

In addition to the surface appearance of these various styles of dress, Haya women and men pay special attention to the surface of their skin, especially in the course of events—like birth, marriage, and death<sup>9</sup>—that constitute the life cycle. Haya men and especially Haya women told me that beautiful skin is soft and shiny, or clear (*okuela*, the descriptive verb used, can mean “to be clear,” “to shine,” “to be white”). To give their skin this appearance, Haya men and women often apply oils to their skin. In the past, butter (*amajuta g’ente*, literally “cow’s oil”) was applied to the skin as well as to animal pelts, in order to make both of them more shiny and supple. Using large quantities of butter on an everyday basis, which required both access to cattle as well as the finest animal skins to be effective, was a practice especially associated with Haya nobility (*abalangila*); yet even commoners and low-ranking Haya farmers (*abairu*) and tenants might be expected to provide a daughter or wife with butter for her skin in preparation for her marriage. Indeed, the term for the events that prepare a bride for leaving her natal home on the day of her wedding is *olusigilo*, which derives from *okusiga*, “to smear, or coat” (i.e., with butter). In the present day, butter is no longer smoothed on the skin, but a variety of petroleum-based oils, available in shops and markets, are still widely used in this way.

The smooth, clear, even white appearance created by applying oil to the skin clearly relates to the kind of seamless enclosure created by bark cloth as well as by the two-piece styles of dress worn by most Haya women. Such applications of oil demonstrate the integrity of the body on its very surface by creating a uniform appearance, uninterrupted by blemishes or other marks. I further suggest that this concern with surface appearance and form as a focus of Haya aesthetics has an important temporal dimension, one that may be significant to the ways in which memories are constructed through clothing and adornment more generally, especially in mortuary contexts. The smoothness and whiteness of well-oiled skin, according to the descriptions of Haya men and women, projects a kind of pristine appearance, one that suggests, in temporal terms, a return to an original, unsullied condition. For example, newly married women oil their skin quite often in an attempt, as they say, to become as white/clear as



possible. This whiteness, then, is characteristic of the beauty and prestige of the *initial* stages of marriage. Furthermore, this white condition is associated with the pigmentation of a newborn child; in effect, a newly married woman reverts to the pristine condition of infancy. This oiling creates a condition preceding the experiences of socialization (and sexuality) which, at least in Haya men's accounts, makes them more susceptible to the sexual control of their new husbands.

Moreover, a woman who has recently given birth is also described as shining and white, just like her new infant, and this postpartum appearance is relevant to her husband's attempts to reassert his access to her sexuality and reproductive capacity. After a woman has given birth, her husband will attempt to establish the clan membership of the next child to whom his wife gives birth at any point in the future. This right is secured by being the first to have sexual contact with a woman after she has given birth. The initial semen (*ebisisi*, literally "embers") of this sexual act ensures a husband's "paternity" over his wife's next child, regardless of when that child is born (see also Reining 1967, 151; Swantz 1985, 72–73). This understanding of paternity and clan identification connects sexuality to reproduction through a definitive sequence from an *initial* act of intercourse through to any *future* pregnancy and childbirth. The whiteness of a woman who has just given birth embodies this temporal orientation. The original, new, pristine condition of a new wife, new mother, or newborn child is visibly apparent on the gleaming surface of their skin.

These temporal shifts and efforts to project a pristine appearance are not restricted to these processes of matrimonial and reproductive renewal. Haya women, and occasionally men, oil their skin as often as they possibly can. After scrubbing and washing, especially one's hands and feet, a really thorough "cleaning" is best achieved by rubbing oil into your exposed skin. While the brilliant, shiny appearance created by oiling in this way was not unremarked upon by my informants, most Haya women and men explained the merits of oiling their skin in somewhat different terms. As one typical account put it, "If you apply oil you won't show any marks." As the woman offered this explanation she scratched a twig along her (oiled) leg to demonstrate how her skin remained unblemished. "When you go out to the fields, the grasses and twigs will leave marks. But they can't if you apply oil to yourself."

This concern with "leaving marks," which was routinely offered to me as a reason for oiling your skin, confirms the prevalent aesthetics of surface appearance. Oiling the skin in these everyday contexts, contexts that entail work and travel (i.e., settings in which one might walk through grassy or wooded areas), provides a means of preserving an unblemished, uninterrupted, seam-



less appearance. At the same time, there is a distinctive temporal quality to this appearance. The fact that oiling prevents “marks” from appearing on your skin suggests that you can avoid registering the tangible traces of activity. The seamless surface of oiled skin, therefore, embodies a form of spatial integrity and pristine brilliance that also obscures the inscription of time’s passing. Oiling the skin not only suggests a renewal and return to an original condition, it also delays concrete appearances that register the passage of time.

I have argued that there is an important Haya aesthetic of surface appearances, an aesthetic that can be seen to organize mortuary styles of adornment, bodily comportment, and funeral shroud production and clothing. What is especially interesting about this aesthetic is that the concern with seamless surfaces and bodily integrity embedded in Haya practices creates a form of spatial coherence that has important temporal consequences as well. As Haya accounts of the surface of the skin suggest, a smooth, unblemished, and uninterrupted skin presents a particular temporal orientation. A smooth skin tangibly embodies a renewed and untrammelled condition that effaces the passage of time. While oiling the skin is not generally a part of Haya mortuary procedures,<sup>10</sup> the practice of shaving the head (*okutega ishoke*) is an important feature of these processes. Shaving creates a surface appearance similar to oiling, which, given the spatial and temporal orientations discussed above, may have significance for the ways in which memories are constructed at these times.

Shaving was occasionally described to me as an onerous obligation but also as a sure sign of mourning that allowed others to recognize your bereavement. Thus, shaving is clearly intended to create an *appearance*, an additional smooth, seamless form, that embodies the condition of mourning. Much has been made of the symbolic value of hair as a tangible medium of growth and expansion of the body. As a substance that grows beneath the skin, and yet extends beyond its surface, hair readily lends itself to discourses and practices concerned with the manipulation and negotiation of sociocultural boundaries and the distinctive expression of collective forms of identity (Turner n.d.; Vlahos 1979; Comaroff 1985). The identification of those in mourning is an important and frequently cited effect achieved through Haya shaving practices. Moreover, the importance of surfaces and enclosure that I have discussed as characteristic of Haya aesthetics indicates that shaving produces a newly created surface. Just as oiling the skin “clears” a smooth surface that, in Haya perceptions, effaces the passage of time, shaving also removes the concrete evidence of time and growth literally embodied in hair.

However, shaving, I would argue, is a more complex, even ambiguous, form of “adornment” than oiling; this much is at least suggested by the fact that oil-



ing is a practice associated with both everyday appearances as well as a range of ceremonial occasions, while shaving is strictly reserved for periods of mourning.<sup>11</sup> Shaving draws upon the tensions of the skin as a surface that conjoins internalized activity, growth, and vitality with external expansion and extension of the physical body. A shaved head, for example, clearly presents a smooth, uninterrupted surface. And Haya mourners, in fact, make a special effort to prevent blemishes from appearing on a newly shaved scalp (this was always the reason given to me for applying banana leaves to your head after shaving), thereby accentuating once again the importance of seamless integrity. But shaving not only presents the appearance of enclosure, it also produces a form of potentially dangerous exposure. Haya men and women often comment on the fact that a shaved head is particularly susceptible to the effects of the hot sun, and colloquially refer to a sun “strong enough to shave with.” Exposure of this sort can lead to lethargy and even madness if it is not controlled. Shaving, then, like the mortuary process to which it is so integral, conjoins elements of enclosure and restriction with those of exposure and dissolution in an attempt to recreate—in bodily as well as collective terms—the integrity of those in mourning.

The timing of this procedure and the sets of social relations engaged in shaving are especially important to the meanings of adornment that have been addressed thus far. Two to three days after the deceased has been buried, men and women in mourning for their clansman will have their heads shaved. Anyone who considers themselves a “relative” (these days the Swahili term for “cousin/brother,” *ndugu*, is used) of the deceased can elect to have their head shaved. This may include agnates and affines, or even particularly close friends. It is interesting to note, however, some important connections between shaving and funeral shrouds, connections that turn on the relations of affinity so closely linked to the development of Haya sociality and the temporal structuring of memory and anticipation. A few days after the burial of the deceased, and roughly coincidental with the shaving of the mourners, the deceased’s daughters return to their marital homes from the site of the funeral. The next day they bring with them enormous pots of cooked food, which are used to feed and thereby give thanks and acknowledge the prior contributions of those who have attended the first several days of a funeral. Like the blankets and sheets of bridewealth that recall those spoiled during childhood, these pots of food are intended to recall the troubles that those in attendance at a funeral have endured. The term for these pots of food (at least in the southern regions of Buhaya) is *engembe*, which, according to several senior informants, is a somewhat antiquated word for razor.<sup>12</sup> These gifts of food, therefore, are closely related to the shaving that (very roughly) coincides with their presentation.

These gifts of food and the shaving procedure can further be associated with the provision of funeral shrouds. These pots of food are (stereotypically) provided by daughters of the deceased, who prepare the food at their husband's homes (usually aided by members of their matrilineal funeral association, *ekyama*) and transport it back to their natal home for consumption. This pattern of provision and consumption follows that of funeral shrouds, which, as we have seen, are provided by the affines of one's children. The parallels between these offerings also extend to the specific ways in which they establish connections between affines and agnates, as well as the mourning community as a whole. Like the funeral shrouds provided for the deceased, the "razors" will ultimately be used to create an appearance for those in mourning. That is, just as the mourners' gift of funeral shrouds that wrap the deceased provide the cloth to be worn by those in mourning, the foods (or "razors") prepared by returning daughters is associated with the shaving of those in mourning. Mourners, in both instances, fulfill an obligation to *others* (the deceased and those who attend the deceased's funeral) by means of tokens that create *their own* appearance as mourners. These agents simultaneously *perform* and *represent* the meanings of their social positions.

There is, moreover, a similar aesthetic of seamless surfaces created by shaving, which complements the material form of funeral shrouds (especially bark cloth shrouds). I would further argue that the most important feature of these prepared pots of food with respect to the structuring of these various social relations has to do with the significance of food itself and its precise place in the mortuary process. However, the range of culturally configured practices, concepts, and debates that are entailed in food-related activities is far too wide to adequately address here.<sup>13</sup> For present purposes, it is sufficient to point out that food provision and preparation are practices critical to demonstrating household self-sufficiency. Haya domestic arrangements, from the spatial distribution of crops on a family farm to the cooking techniques of boiling and roasting at the hearth, are all oriented toward securing internalized control over food as a means of achieving household independence.

Given these very basic concerns, the gifts of food at this particular point in the mortuary process exemplify a set of spatial and temporal tensions similar to the dynamic orientations of Haya adornment aesthetics. On the one hand, these gifts of cooked food are taken into the house of the deceased and redistributed to those who have attended the funeral. This ability to feed one's friends and neighbors, especially on the usually sumptuous food prepared for such offerings, suggests a degree of control over food. A house in mourning (which eats very poorly for the first few days following death) thereby begins to



reestablish its integrity through this use of food. At the same time, this food is clearly provided and, just as importantly, cooked by those from outside the household itself. Accepting food that has been grown on distant lands and cooked at hearths far removed from the hearth that is a focus of domestic productivity also demonstrates that the mourning household depends on others to sustain it at these times. Thus, the pots of food provided by children of the deceased from their marital homes convey a sense of the tensions characteristic of the mourning process. Both the emerging control, enclosure, and integrity of the mourning household, as well as its continued dependence upon and potential susceptibility to outsiders at these times are concretized in the pots of cooked food.

### *Conclusion*

These food presentations establish certain direct connections with Haya adornment practices. Their description as “razors” links them to shaving, and their provision ties them to the central affinal offerings of funeral shrouds. But, more importantly, the orientations instantiated by these gifts of food implicates them in the *aesthetic* common to shaving and wearing funeral shrouds. These pots of food not only share a pattern of distribution with these other items, they tangibly incorporate the values and contradictions posed by presenting an *appearance* in the course of the mortuary process. All of these related activities and offerings draw attention to the specific sociocultural problems of integrity and coherence in the face of death, problems that are made concretely evident in the surface forms of mortuary. The tensions of productive enclosure and the susceptibilities of exposure are combined and revealed in the surface appearance of a mourner’s shaved head, the seamless construction of a bark cloth shroud, or the mourning household’s distribution of the cooked food it has received. And, as we have seen, these surface appearances also exemplify temporal qualities that complement the spatial ones described. Both continuities and discontinuities are created in the seamless surfaces of Haya mortuary practices. Shaving can suggest a form of renewal in the sense of reinitiating a process of growth; the gift of a funeral shroud can be seen to complete the anticipated outcome of an ongoing relationship. There are spatiotemporal *discontinuities*, as well. The severance of shaving or the separation of shrouding—and thereby the concealing of the deceased—imply a rupture in the temporal forms of the body as it is positioned in the establishment of Haya sociality. These dynamics also recall the qualities of heirlooms played upon by grandchildren’s effigies, a practice that disguises and deceives through the appear-

ances it reveals. These, then, are the shifting and ambiguous potentialities of a surface form—possibilities of enclosure and disclosure, integrity and dissipation—that make not just clothing but the broader activities of adornment and creating an appearance such an extremely rich field for constituting the temporal orientations out of which Haya memories are created and recreated.

Haya understandings of clothing, then, suggest that adornment is an important aspect of the construction of identity and sociality over time. In the specific context of Haya mortuary practices, adornment often concerns processes of memorialization, of remembering the dead while participating in, undermining, or transforming aspects of the deceased's identity. From a more general perspective, I have also argued that the significance of clothing to processes such as these has to do with actually *wearing* clothing. Haya activities surrounding death demonstrate that the complex questions entailed in wearing clothing and the variety of ways in which it can be worn make clothing more than just an object that mediates interpersonal relations, but a medium whose objective qualities emerge in the course of social practice itself. In particular, the practices of clothing the body and the array of activities in which clothing figures work to generate appearances, surfaces that are not merely facades but rather tangible embodiments of the dynamic orientations of social process. Such appearances create dynamic surfaces that expose and enclose, reveal exterior and conceal interior dimensions of the body. The Haya adornment practices through which they create appearances give clothing the capacity to articulate alternative constructions of identity—to contrast seniors and juniors, agnates and affines, Europeans and Tanzanians—and to embody, through time, continuities and discontinuities, anticipations and memorials.

### Notes

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- 1 This essay is based on field research carried out in 1988–1990 in the Muleba District of the Kagera Region in Tanzania. In this essay the words I have cited in translation are from Oluhaya, except in those cases where I have indicated that the word is Kiswahili, or have given both Oluhaya and Kiswahili terms.



- 2 *Kansu* are long white robes, rather like a cassock, that Haya say they have “borrowed” from Muslim styles of dress.
- 3 Provided they aren’t agnates themselves—i.e., this excludes only one’s father’s father’s clan; all other grandparental clansmen are possible marriage partners.
- 4 *Kanga* and *kitenge* are commercially produced printed textiles. *Kanga* worn in Tanzania are often produced in Tanzanian or Kenyan factories. The printed design is often a central image (an animal, a kerosene lamp, or a political leader, to cite only some of the most popular images) with a surrounding border. Often, a Swahili proverb is printed as part of the border design. *Kitenge* are also printed textiles, but they have a much broader range of designs and origins. I have seen Indian saris, Indonesian batiks, and Rwandan cloth worn as *kitenge* in Kagera.
- 5 Such marriages (*okukaitwa* in Haya, *Kufunga ndoa* in Swahili) are not commonplace. In the late 1980s, only a small percentage of rural Haya marriages (perhaps less than a third) had ever been “officially” sanctioned in this way.
- 6 My ideas about the construction of time and space and of sociocultural practice as producing concrete orientations of time are derived from Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (1962). I develop my analyses of Haya temporal and spatial orientations more fully in Weiss 1996.
- 7 I should point out that a woman engaged in manual work in the fields or around the house would not be expected to enclose her upper body in this way. Still, many women would wrap a second cloth across their backs while working, thereby freeing their arms for work, but also maintaining the propriety of a second cloth.
- 8 While my Haya friends remarked on how large bark cloth could be, they bemoaned the fact that it was no longer as smooth and soft as many of them remembered.
- 9 Indeed, the term *obugenyi*, which is most frequently used for “wedding,” can be used to describe any of the celebrations that accompany either a marriage, birth, or death. As one friend told me, “A person has three celebrations [*obugenyi*], not just a marriage [*obugole*].”
- 10 While people may well oil themselves in times of mourning, I never heard anyone describe this as a common mortuary practice.
- 11 Indeed, I was often told that it would be improper to shave your head at other times, because, being so strongly associated with mourning, it would suggest that you wished ill of a clansman.
- 12 The Swahili word for razor is *wembe*, which is a cognate of the apparently archaic *engembe*. In contemporary Buhaya, the vernacular for razor is *jileta*, derived from the ubiquitous Gillette brand of blades.
- 13 See Weiss 1996 for a more detailed discussion of the many values of Haya food.