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From Morgue to Family Compound
Overcoming Socio-Material Constraints

Peki enjoys the luxury of having its own local morgue, an institution that many towns do not have direct access to. Being a state-owned and state-run institution, the morgue is part of the Peki Government Hospital complex in Peki-Tsame. For people in the Peki community, the proximity of the morgue makes it easy to transfer the body of a relative into town for their funeral, or to bring their dead who return from outside of Peki here to keep them close-by while funeral preparations are going on. It is common practice to regularly visit a dead relative at the morgue, to see the body and cry, rather than to forget about the frozen dead while body and spirit remain in a state of limbo. This, too, is easy with the morgue close-by. The Peki morgue is also used by people from other communities in the vicinity. Less conveniently, these people must travel for up to two hours to the Peki morgue for transports, visits, transfers or to pick up bodies.

Until Alfred Yao's burial on the coming Saturday, the open grave that we have dug with clan members and supporters will wait in the Avetile cemetery. Other preparations must now be made for the funeral, such as washing and picking up Alfred's body from the morgue, dressing him and presenting the deceased to mourners. The lying in state, at which the dead body can be viewed on Friday nights before being buried on the following Saturday, usually takes place in the family compound or at the house of a local relative. For the duration of an evening or night, this house is the centre of attention and a temporary resting place for the dead body. On its journey, the body travels from the morgue, a state-owned institution, to the family house before then continuing to the cemetery. This chapter accompanies Alfred Yao on his way to being buried, completing the 'good death' sequence. Returning to Gell's idea of mapping and navigating time and space by means of chrono-geography, it shows how constraints are made and overcome by means of rules, the materiality of spaces, and social

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practice. In turn, the dead continue onwards on their path towards control, in the process of making the dead as ideal indices.

Rubbing Shoulders with the Dead: Payments and Constraints to Movement

On the weekend of Alfred Yao's funeral, I have an early Friday morning appointment at the Peki morgue with Lucy Atta, undertaker and relative of the deceased. My friend and assistant Collins, Alfred Yao's half-brother, has announced that he is not attending the washing at the morgue with me, possibly because this is a job mainly reserved for older female relatives. So, I arrive on my own. I have visited the morgue several times already and am prepared for the presence of dead bodies. Upon my arrival, I am told that I am late for the washing. I find Lucy in a corner behind the entrance door, sitting on Alfred Yao's body and working on his face. On Fridays, the morgue is an overwhelmingly busy place. Different parties arrive in the morning and throughout the day to wash their relatives and transport them, sometimes to towns further away, more often to a house in Peki. If the body travels to town, it must be picked up before six in the evening, which generally applies to all bodies, no matter their destination. Specifically, dead bodies may also not enter Peki before 6 p.m., meaning before sunset, in accordance with traditional beliefs as determined by the Peki Traditional Council. This leads to a culmination of pick-ups from Peki as dusk draws closer to avoid having to wait with the body outside town. Alfred Yao's body is now undergoing cosmetic interventions such as gluing his lips together with superglue and modelling his nose into a perfect shape with cotton wool. Bodily openings are sealed, and the face is adjusted to fit the expression of a person 'at rest'. Alfred Yao's daughter Yawa,[1] a student from Cape Coast, and I loiter in the courtyard in front of the morgue, trying to stay out of the sun and kneeling within the fine line of shade that is insufficiently provided by a wall which fences the morgue off from the regular hospital grounds. The inside of the morgue is too crowded to remain there for long, so we keep going in and back out again, as do most other people. While Lucy is working on the body which is lying on the floor next to the door, new parties arrive in a constant flow and the two washing tables are permanently in use. As is usually the case on Fridays, people who belong to the accompanying delegations rub shoulders with both the living and the dead. It is not unusual to look up and see a stiff body lifted above your head as it is passed from the cooling chamber to the washing table.

As a public institution, the morgue subjects visitors, undertakers and the dead bodies stored here, as well as morgue employees, to a set of rules and regulations which impose constraints on the proceedings of storing, washing and picking up bodies. As I have written elsewhere, these rules also extend to include cleaning processes in town beyond the dead body (Bredenbröker 2020a). Alfred Gell describes the correlation between socio-institutional

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regulations and more immediately perceivable spatio-temporal constraints as working in the same way: 'The framework of institutional (normative, regulatory) constraints on activity allocations represent socially codified expectations about potentially real events and cause-and-effect relationships between these events . . . We may take it, then, that physical constraints and institutional constraints are really the same kind of thing; i.e. constraints on the bringing about of certain desired states-of-affairs, which are regarded as physical possibilities, even if they are not so in reality' (1992: 192–93). The wall that surrounds the morgue prominently features an official announcement, consisting of typewritten photocopies with a protective foil: 'Notice from the head of finance: Persons who wish to take their corpse from the mortuary should make all payments by Thursday 3:00 pm. No payments shall be received afterwards. Note also that no corpse shall be released to any relative after 6:00 pm. Thank you'. Possibly to underline the seriousness of the message, the paper has been posted to the wall twice. As official documents, both papers are signed and stamped at the bottom. Fees must be paid to the hospital clerk and payment must be verified with a receipt from the hospital. Hovering over the wall with these two sheets of paper is a large, brightly coloured billboard, announcing that the Peki morgue is sponsored by an energy drink company. The text on this sign refers to the 'Peki Hospital Mortuary Notice' regarding payment: 'Note that you are not to pay money / item to the mortuary staff. Any client who pays any amount of money / item to any staff at the mortuary without obtaining an official receipt does so at his / her own risk'. These somewhat conflicting messages of official instructions, strict regulations and energy drink advertisements ('Lucozade: Fast Acting Glucose Energy') already imply a blurry set of boundaries and influences at play here.

State money and private sponsorship seem to go hand in hand, as they claim authority over the regulation of monetary flows and the movements of bodies. However, these signs are written in English, not Ewe, meaning that the recipient of these messages must be able to read English, which cannot be commonly assumed. One may also just as well decide to ignore the rules laid out there if these messages are not enforced by state representatives acting upon them or by the material infrastructure of the morgue. And while there is usually a representative of the Public Health Office present on Fridays, the staff in the morgue, the flows of people, dead and alive, as well as the technology that is used, come to play more direct, more active roles in the making of ground rules and constraints at the morgue.

Material and Institutional Infrastructure

The morgue building is tucked away at the back of the Peki Government Hospital complex, which is surrounded by a concrete wall, a gate and a guard. The morgue itself is surrounded by a second, interior wall. The hospital complex consists of a larger set of buildings, the morgue being a

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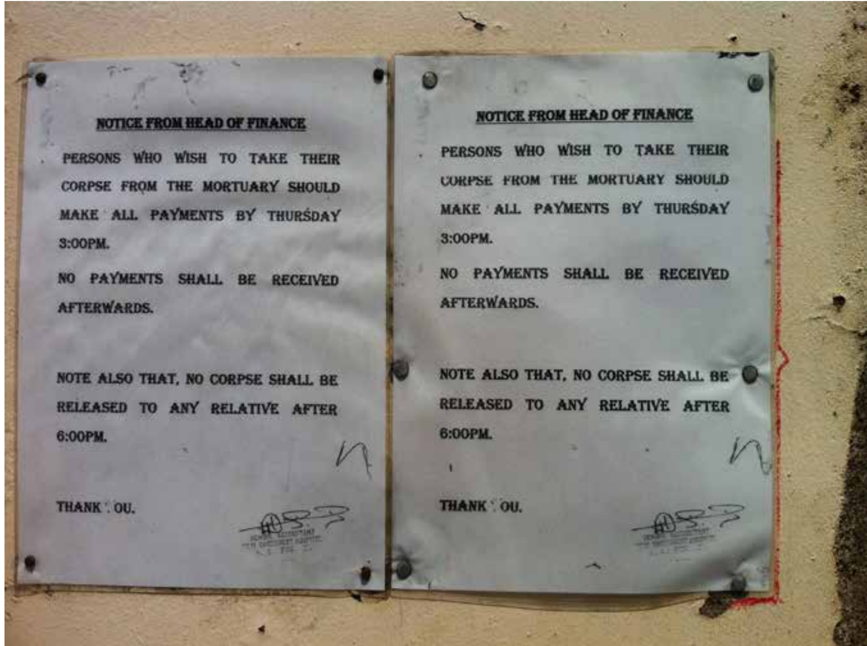

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 Signs with rules at the Peki morgue in 2017. © Isabel Bredenbröker

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small but sturdy concrete house with an external cooling chamber, which can only be accessed from its yard. This cooling chamber is furnished with simple shelves on which bodies are stored next to one another and it has capacity for several dozen people – in periods of extreme demand, the floor has also been used, so I am told. The morgue building itself is adjacent. It has an entrance area, a thawing and storage area, a separate washing room and an office. There is a new metal washing table with an integrated tap and sink in the entrance area, to the right-hand side of the door in the main building. The two wings of the wooden door always stand wide open, coincidentally creating spaces with more privacy behind them. Used soap bars and foam sponges of different sizes lie on the vertically opened glass lamella of the window leading out into the yard. A room to the left of the washing table is used for storing thawing bodies that are about to be picked up. Here, there are a few metal cooling units for individual bodies in the wall. The first time that I visited the morgue with Lucy happened to be on a Thursday afternoon and I was faced with a pile of bodies on top of one another, insufficiently covered with several pieces of fabric. On other days of the week, this room is empty. Because so many bodies get picked up on Fridays, the staff store everybody who will be buried that weekend in this room for easy and quick access. Bodies are naked, apart from a set of white underwear and a white identificatory wristband as well as the occasional piece of fabric as a makeshift necklace for easier identification, with arms tucked into the side of the undergarments. A small alcove in the entrance room is used to store washed and packaged bodies that are waiting to be picked up in the evening. To the right of the entrance area, an open door leads to another room with an older washing table made of terrazzo stone. A large plastic water storage container stands in the corner of the room, providing immediate water supply, especially for times when the tap water is cut off. A large bucket filled with water is placed at the head of the table with a calabash bowl floating on the water's surface. Another door at the foot of the terrazzo table leads to the director's office. She is an impressive older lady who reigns over this compact kingdom of the dead and she also owns the town's only traditional *kente* weaving workshop. Her office at the morgue is situated at the back and on weekdays she can usually be found here. The desk features several thick books in which she registers the arrival of bodies, the names and kin of the deceased, as well as payments and checkout. Official process sheets on the wall give information about how to react in case of mass casualties or infectious diseases, how to pick up a body and whom to give the mandatory bottle of local gin to. 'Castle Bridge' gin is expected to be given by relatives as a token, despite the official announcement on the outside not to give 'money or items' to the staff without receipt. Since the pouring of libations in the form of gin is a way of pacifying spirits, the gift of a 'token' bottle of gin is a kind of payment in a currency that ultimately serves to appease the dead and other spirits. Bottles of gin can either be used for such purposes or passed on should an occasion

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require it. A bench along the wall awaits parties of visitors who may come to inquire about their relatives. They might also come to deliver a body or discuss the picking up of a corpse. Apart from these sporadic visits, the morgue is a quiet place during the week. The main event, during which the place overflows with people and activity, is the washing of bodies on Friday mornings.

As a building equipped with a specific technology – deep-freeze chambers – the morgue provides a service that Ghanaians now very much rely on, although it is still not necessarily the case that this technology is always available everywhere. In the steamy Ghanaian heat, it is easily understood that a technology that provides not just cooling but freezing conditions means making an effort to change environmental conditions dramatically, even if this only occurs in an enclosed space like the morgue. As infrastructure, it requires investment and maintenance. There must be a steady and reliable supply of water and electrical energy. In Ghana, however, blackouts and water shortages that leave the taps dry are frequent and to be expected. Hence, an emergency generator supplies the morgue with energy during 'lights out' and there is a water tank to fall back on. The morgue gains in importance as the single institution in town with a reliable emergency generator. It can be seen to 'waste' money and energy, as it requires both in constant supply. Following Chris Gregory (1980), this kind of wastefulness may again be considered a ritual gift to the 'gods', in this case, the dead. From the veranda of my house in Peki-Afeviofe, I had a good view of the hospital, which was slightly elevated at the foot of the hill on the opposite side of the valley. During nights without electricity, the hospital with its prominent mobile network antenna was the only place in town glowing in the dark. While this emergency energy provided light and electricity for the patients, nurses and doctors, it also supplied the morgue, ensuring that the cooling chambers always remained below zero. Being relatively independent of the arbitrariness and manipulations of the general energy supply (given that the generator functions, and petrol is supplied) means that the morgue and hospital are in a better position than private households or businesses in Peki. And while the state is paying for the emergency measures, it might, in conjunction with energy companies and weather conditions, also be partially responsible for some of the blackouts in the town. As a result, the morgue is in some ways less subject to possible intentional manipulations to the energy supply, for example in the form of forced rationing or blackouts timed to coincide with moments that could provoke trouble in town. There were a few instances of Friday-night lying in states when the lights went out around 6.30 pm – possibly intentionally as it appeared to me – just when the bodies had arrived in town. One of these instances was the public lying in state ceremony for the victim of a stabbing in Peki-Dzake, an event that, so it was feared, would be accompanied by violence and youth misbehaviour. Without electricity, the crowd that had gathered dispersed quickly in the dark. State intervention prioritizes recipients of electricity and water,

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whether that means cutting connections or making sure they continue. It is state money that gives the morgue and hospital a more secure position: funds are channelled into a generator which is not part of the shared infrastructure, meaning that other community members cannot benefit from it directly. Hence, the morgue and the dead stored here are tied to the fates of the sick who are being treated in hospital, and prioritized over the living in receiving water and electricity.

Matters of health, life and death in the hospital-morgue complex are technically the concern of the state, and all movements within both institutions are synchronized by slow bureaucratic processes and a lot of back and forth with payment slips, files and folders, as well as waiting at different doors and talking to one person at a time in a prescribed order. I experienced this myself as a patient on different occasions. For the living, the hospital and its administrative body can be a difficult and time-consuming place. Whereas the sick must wait for hours to get treatment, the director of the morgue is always on call and can respond to a death immediately, day and night. Resources are often much more readily available for the dead, and the aesthetics and forms of infrastructure are sometimes re-purposed in surprisingly different functions. A striking example is the many privately run 'ambulance cars' which serve as hearses – and only as hearses. The aesthetics of a Western infrastructural tool which was designed to provide emergency help for the sick and wounded is here appropriated to be used exclusively for the dead. The living, however, must take a taxi or other private means of transportation to the hospital in cases of emergency.

Washing the Body: Unmaking the Social Person in Death

During the Friday morning washings at the morgue, many people flood the restricted space inside the morgue. To make the washing a smooth and not overly painful process for relatives in what is an extremely crowded and hectic environment, certain preparations must be made in advance. It is the task of some of the kin delegates, including the *tɔvi* or 'godparent'[2] to prepare and bring along a bucket with items for the washing. It is common to bring a new plastic bucket with washing equipment as a gift to the deceased. This bucket usually contains soap for the body (new and wrapped, the commodified version of what locals make themselves and sell as loose soap, often in 'traditional' medicine contexts), a small face towel, new white cotton undershirts, pants, and gloves in unopened plastic packaging, an additional tank-top for men, a sponge, a liquid all-purpose antibacterial sanitizer, and a new mat onto which the deceased is laid in their body bag. The mat is used to carry the body, like a hammock. It is usually *not* a Ghanaian straw-mat (which are made from local reed and produced at the mouth of the Volta, in the Keta region), but rather an imported variety, which is wrapped in the same transparent cellophane as is used for the grave wreaths, often printed with festive patterns like small red glitter

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hearts or jubilant 'happy birthday' slogans. The wrappings of commodity items gifted to the dead, such as branded and packaged white underwear, communicate newness as a sign of respect for the dead body. They signal that efforts have been made and money has been spent to purchase new items for them. These items come from China and feature a Chinese model printed on the packaging. This new, packaged white underwear from a different cultural context hence appears as free from associations with previous use or the former life of the deceased. The plastic wrapping and the branding, just as that on the soaps in the washing bucket, are somehow authoritatively put in place pre-acquisition and dissociate the objects from connections to the lives of the deceased. Instead, they evoke a vacuum of associations. The layers that follow on the body – several sets of pre-owned clothing and then a new outfit made for the lying in state – add a deeply personal aspect as well as one of display and representation. In comparison to the grave wreaths, there is a significant difference: while the wreaths remain wrapped and are intended for visual decoration only, the objects used at the morgue and for the dressing, which come into direct contact with the dead body, are intended for use. Their newness actively contributes to the process of cleaning the body of social ties and remaking the deceased as a containable part of the body politic. Like the grave wreaths, the status of newness and the materiality of the 'seals' – the plastic wrappings, but also the super-glue – carry moral implications of respect for the deceased, as is generally the case with regards to synthetic materials. However, not all objects that are used to clean the body and prepare it are new and wrapped. The undertakers also bring their own complementary equipment, some of which is more expensive and only required in small doses. Lucy usually carries a bag of cosmetics to paint the face, a bottle of Florida Water perfume and a mix of antibacterial liquids which she mixes herself from different branded products. These items are needed during the washing and in the process of dressing the body – either directly at the morgue or in the house. The *tɔvi* is traditionally expected to take the bucket and all the things that were used for a washing back to their house and integrate them into the household. Things like the soap, sponge or towel, which are returned to the *tɔvi*, have come into contact with the dead body. Most people object to this practice for hygienic reasons. Yet, it is usually impossible to avoid taking things back altogether. I was told that in most cases, the re-use of these things was limited to the plastic bucket, as a compromise. On other occasions and in other locations of the Ghanaian south, I was told that unused traditional (natural fibre) sponges and soaps had been given to relatives. This, of course, requires additional expense, something that not everyone can afford.

What is of general importance regarding the items for a washing is specifically their newness and being either branded and wrapped or otherwise clearly marked as 'new'. These qualities are, for instance, communicated via the plastic underwear packaging or the soap wrappers. A durable synthetic

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Figures 4.3 and 4.4 Underwear and white gloves for dressing a deceased purchased by the anthropologist in Peki in 2018. © Isabel Bredenbröker

material like plastic, even if only used as wrapping, appears to make an object preferable to an organic material that can be acquired locally from a local producer. Packaged white underwear with Chinese branding on it has become a product that is primarily bought for the dead, even though it could also be worn by living people.

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Other items, like the colourful sponge made of knotted synthetic fibres, which is included in the bucket and used during the washing, are household staples that people use to wash their own bodies and faces as well as their dishes. The traditional variety of natural fibre sponges used back in the day still exists, though I have never seen it in use during the washings. The natural fibre sponge for the dead differs from other natural fibre sponges that are supposed to be used by the living. It is made from finer fibres. In terms of choice of objects, some things seem to belong exclusively to the dead, some to both the living and the dead. The organic, degradable varieties are no longer actively chosen for use on the dead in Peki, and especially not as items in the bucket. A transfer to synthetic materials, as seen in the example of the sponge, or an appropriation of foreign cultural imagery as seen in the packaged underwear, indicate a shift in values conveyed by specific materials. New things, new materials, durability and plastic packaging are necessary for an appropriate washing bucket. Their introduction into a semi-regulated environment gives relatives a degree of agency over making their dead relative's death a 'good' death. Their durable and new qualities also work towards alienating the deceased further from the living and moving them towards a state of containment – like the concrete covers of graves. Instead of adding items that have a personal value, the items in the bucket and their lack of connection to the lives of the deceased help to unmake the deceased's social person. Following Hertz's secondary burial model, they open the deceased's status of social personhood up to a process of remaking. In short, these objects and their synthetic components have the cleaning effect that the washing is supposed to achieve. It is during the washing where things made of synthetics and wrapped in synthetic serve to control and remake the dead, indexically imprinting their attributed properties onto the dead as indices. Through the durability and moral appropriateness of the items and materials used, the bodies and spiritual elements of the dead become chrono-geographically navigable and can be sent to the appropriate location in space and time, affecting their commemoration on earth and their existence in other worlds.

The choice and use of items in the bucket imply a change in what is perceived to be the boundary between life and death. This change, however, conveys its own peculiar logic, integrating some things that are everyday essentials into the practice of washing the dead, while singling out other things that could be (and in some contexts outside of Ghana certainly are) made for the living as only good for dressing the dead. These observations make sense in the light of Webb Keane's concepts of qualisigns and semiotic ideologies (Keane 2003, 2005, 2018), meaning a socially shared selective process of attributing meaning to things, while highlighting some of their potential qualities and ignoring others. The interpretation of material things, following Keane, is thus based on a perspectival attribution of meanings, morals, functions and properties. In the case of washing materials, the decision as to which items are 'appropriate' for the bucket is made by the

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family. Yet, the selective process is a social practice shared by local people who have lost a relative. It is socially translated but not actually regulated or defined. The morgue, with its own catalogue of rules, does not prescribe a washing. However, it is understood that bodies (dead and alive) are washed before they travel. This washing is commonly undertaken by relatives and undertakers. Although morgue employees do stand in to perform washings, this is not at all ideal and may be an expression of disrespect or neglect on the part of living relatives. In that matter, the morgue serves as a state-owned location in which the washing is largely a private practice. However, albeit private, a washing does not happen in a closed or 'private' room. On Friday mornings, the groups that arrive create an accidental kind of public. Everyone is here with a purpose and all who are present are in each other's space, sharing the experience. While the crowds can be overwhelming, particularly in a tight space with many dead bodies around, the presence of family members and strangers alike is also a consolation, making the washing and picking up a lively and social event rather than a glum and solitary experience. After Lucy has finished preparing Alfred Yao's face, he is wrapped in a piece of *kente* cloth and zipped up in the mandatory white body bag that the morgue sells for fifty Cedi, a relatively high price. According to official regulations, a body cannot leave the morgue if it is not contained in this standardized body bag. Bodies that are ready for pick-up remain in the body bag in the front room of the morgue, marked with a black pen stating the person's name to avoid bodies being accidentally mixed up. All bodies that are washed, wrapped and ready to go are stored on the floor and in corners of the morgue until their relatives come back to pick them up for the lying in state. For now, Alfred Yao's body remains in the morgue, wrapped up, lying on its mat, waiting for sunset. Conclusively, the morgue is a station of transit for dead bodies through which they may pass, quickly or slowly, depending on whether their relatives can pay for extending their stay or whether they must keep it relatively short.[3] Its regulatory constraints are manifested as social constraints through payments, and religious and moral regulations. They are also enforced through the physical constraints created by walls, space and cooling technologies. These help to achieve control over the dead and the living alike, while aiding in indexically imprinting ideal qualities onto the dead. Leaving the morgue, at last, means acquiring controlled mobility and coming closer to the state of 'good' death.

Transport and Lying in State: More Constraints

After their washing at the morgue, the naked bodies of the dead are wrapped up in old and new clothing, continuously adding new layers that separate these bodies from the world of the living. Initially, bodies are dressed in multiple layers of their own clothing, stuffed with additional padding material to increase their volume, and carefully augmented with

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a final display outfit. In the final representation during a lying in state, only the face of the deceased will be left uncovered. This Friday evening, Alfred Yao's body will be laid in state in the hallway of the Avetile family compound. Lucy has already decorated the room. The door at the back is covered by a veil of brightly coloured fabric, visually closing the room off and creating a secondary, inner room that did not exist before. The only sign of there being a throughway behind the fabric is the deep humming of a freezer and the occasional person lifting the fabric and slipping underneath it. On the other side, the hallway continues towards the living room and is closed off with a temporary curtain. The decoration is basic, mainly consisting of fabric covering the ceiling and the floor. In the afternoon, I am taken to the neighbouring house of the maternal family. The women of the family and female guests who have arrived sit together and make *kenkey* dumplings, skilfully folding the fermented corn dough that has been prepared into a dry corn leaf. The food will be served after the funeral during a buffet and will feed the family and their guests over the next couple of days. In the evening, Collins and I stay in town and wait for the body to arrive. The arrival of a body requires a procedure in which the maternal and paternal families with their representatives and elders meet at an agreed place on the road in town to exchange drinks, pour libations to the ancestors and verify that the body is in fact the correct one. Plastic chairs are normally put out at the spot near the road where the paternal clan meets on such occasions. In this case, however, both the maternal and paternal sides happen to be from Alfred Yao's clan, which makes the choice of a meeting place easy. Representatives of both families sit facing each other. A linguist, the traditional spokesperson and mediator, sits on his small wooden stool between them. When the body arrives in the back of a pick-up truck, a symbolic pair of parents go to check on it and verify that this body is the body of Alfred Yao, not someone else. Such symbolic roles take the pressure off close relatives who then do not have to face the dead body in a premature state. Due to the high volume of stored bodies in morgues, all of which are naked apart from very similar white underwear and wrapped in the same white body bags, mistakes and swaps are not uncommon and therefore widely feared. On the way to the house, a body's identity may be verified several times by different people in symbolic parental roles. Alfred Yao's momentary 'parents' let the body pass. The family delegations are now exchanging bottles of 'Castle Bridge' spirits and, as custom demands, the bottle contributed by the maternal side is accepted by the paternal side and then returned to the donors. Drinks are shared and libations poured by the linguist. While the body is taken into town, a brass band that has been hired for the occasion plays funeral music. The body travels through town, revisiting the houses of relatives and familiar places until it finally arrives at the family compound and is carried into the house. Later, a DJ will play music and a traditional drumming ensemble will complete the picture.

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Inside the fabric-clad room, Lucy and her team of two assistants are waiting to begin their work of decorating the body. Lucy has a collection of fabrics, decorative items, washing and cosmetic supplies, augmented by technology for special effects such as a smoke machine or a rotating disco-ball light, but she also brings in furniture, such as metal bedframes and wooden stands for coffins. These items are her capital. New apprentices must contribute items she needs if they want to become her students. Lucy goes on frequent shopping trips to Accra to find decorative items at a good price. The decorated lying in state room functions as a stage for the dead body and is reminiscent of a patchwork or an assemblage. Different components are temporarily brought in and given a new function. Things that are professionally installed, such as a wooden scaffolding on which the pieces of fabric are attached, might be cobbled together from bits and pieces to be economical and to make it adjustable to individual rooms. Fabrics that are used for hangings are brought by the undertaker and can be re-used for another funeral or other decorative jobs after being washed. The body is dressed in a mixture of clothes that were owned by the deceased as well as in a representative outer layer of clothes, usually made or bought for the occasion. The undertaker contributes decorative items such as fashion jewellery, makeup, accessories, plastic flowers and welded flower stands or props like wigs and an imitation traditional crown to give the set a finished appearance. The coffin is a commodity that is delivered as another prop. In its more expensive varieties, it is even wrapped in plastic foil for delivery to keep dust and damage away until it is installed.

The Coffin: Appropriating 'Foreign' Aesthetics

Alfred Yao's coffin is already in place in the room, elevated on concrete blocks, which later also serve as support for his back. Concrete blocks are often kept lying around as flexible building materials for temporary usage. As a truck driver, Alfred will not be laid, but he will rather sit in state for the beginning of the evening, imitating his position behind the wheel. Coffins are likely to be made in Peki by local carpenters, but they could also be bought in Accra if the person buying them does not think the local models are of the desired quality or material. A friend who returned to Peki after thirty years of living in the United States wanted a simple, untreated mahogany coffin when his father died in 2016. This, from a local point of view, was perceived as a strange choice: a coffin is meant to shine and sparkle. Polished varnish, a voluminous body and golden handles are a common, sought-after look. To obtain an unusual, 'no-frills' coffin, he had to order it from a coffin-maker in Accra who also catered to more 'Westernized' tastes. 'Westernized', in this case, refers to a sense of simplicity in aesthetics and design, following the 'less is more' principle and associated with the vague imagination of a cultural 'West'. In Peki, minimalist aesthetic preferences, which differ from the local imagination of what 'Western' modernism means – kitsch, plastic,

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and expressive designs – are slowly starting to appear, as can be seen in the homogenous, simplistic but expensive design of a recently opened private cemetery. Popular taste, however, demands the extra add-ons of 'imported' elements and voluminous shapes for a coffin to be properly representative.

Some carpenters in Peki specialize in making coffins, while some make them alongside other types of woodwork. In general, though, the coffin is a carpentry product that can be produced in a reasonable amount of time and sold at a relatively high price and for which there is a constant demand, meaning that it is particularly worthwhile for carpenters to make coffins. The timber is usually sourced locally and then processed in the carpentry workshops. On a walk through town, one encounters many workshops, large and small, along the main road and in the back streets, with a high concentration of them near the hospital and morgue complex. Most if not all carpentry workshops offer coffins. In conversation with several carpenters who had set up their workshops next to the hospital, I found that their work and the process of making a coffin bears similarity to the 'composite' way in which grave wreaths are crafted. The process of making a coffin out of wood is only the basis for what then becomes the coffin. To fulfil the standards of a proper Ghanaian coffin, other elements must be added: satin and padding as a covering material for the inside, metal hinges that allow

Figure 4.5 Collins Jamson, friend and research assistant to the anthropologist with dog Faustus pictured at a carpentry workshop selling coffins and grave wreaths in Peki in 2017. © Isabel Bredenbröker

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Figure 4.6 A coffin wrapped in plastic is waiting for the lying in state in Peki in 2017. © Isabel Bredenbröker

the coffin to fold open on its four corners, shiny metal embellishments such as crosses and handles, and paint. Coffins may also be delivered wrapped in plastic, to protect these valuable aesthetic features for the final presentation.

A carpenter in Peki-Tsame, who was trained as a coffin-maker, describes the ornamentation and finishes for the coffin as a recent phenomenon and

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as 'European'. The ornaments, he says, which are made of plastic or metal, are attractive, and people like them. But even though they are aesthetically associated with Europe, he says that he believes they are produced in Dubai. He himself takes frequent trips to Accra to buy new decorative elements. The decoration raises the price of the coffin, and he is aware that in some cases people take the decoration off before burying the coffin, so they do not have to pay for it, which he himself rejects for his business: 'Everything is for you to keep, you go and bury it'.

Another carpenter in Peki-Tsame recounts that, within the history of his business, the influx of new synthetic materials and plastics has led to a reduced demand for wooden carpentry items for everyday use, such as furniture. In reaction, the carpenter's strategy was to shift his business mainly to the production of coffins. A mattress can lie on the floor without a bedframe, so nobody bothers to buy a bed anymore, he says. Traditionally, handcrafted reed mats were and still are used to sleep on; bedframes were introduced as a missionary import, as were coffins. Mats were formerly used to bury people instead of coffins: the one-year-anniversary of a burial was called the 'rolling of the mat'. Today, bodies which are picked up from the morgue are still carried on a mat. Yet, instead of using the mats that are produced locally and from local materials, mats that are gifted to the dead and then used to transport them are imported and wrapped in cellophane foil. Aesthetically, this mirrors the use of decoration on the coffin. Added decorative elements produce a distinct look that is popular in southern Ghana – yet, they communicate the fiction of following aesthetics that have been copied and appropriated from Western contexts. Wood, the locally sourced base material, is covered by layers and elements that hide its materiality and imbue it with a sense of artificiality. Coffins, true to the Western idea, are still made of wood – but invisibly so. In addition, this carpenter buys his decorative materials from Accra, choosing, among other resources, from a catalogue of the London Casket Company's West African Division, a company selling coffins and coffin decorations which, according to their website, 'blend the true African culture with that of the western world' (The London Casket Company). The coffin, being covered with elements and layers that turn it into an artificial object, is an explicit composition: it repurposes aesthetics and materials that are viewed as 'Western', although they are probably produced elsewhere in the world and ultimately are defining for a uniquely Ghanaian funerary aesthetic.

Following Eduardo de la Fuente's (2008) elaborations on Georg Simmel's aesthetic theory, the combination of social and aesthetic form in specific situations may go beyond mere analogy. The artificial forms and elements of the coffin, which are sought after and looked at by a large public of relatives and funeralgoers in Peki, do not only come to stand for the refashioning of the deceased in the face of the community. This aesthetics, as conveyed by the form and material of the coffins, contributes just as much as the public that views it and establishes whether it is morally good and appropriate.

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The coffin, in the context of Hertz's secondary burial model, is a manifestation of the social body. The composition of the coffin shows that a sense of artificiality, which Simmel also identifies as a necessary stylization in his study of sociability (la Fuente 2008), is an integral quality of this social body, as it is made manifest and re-made in the course of funerals in Peki. The fabric of the social body is imbued with this quality of artificiality by incorporating the dead as indices of controlled and morally appropriate relations. This process is represented and maintained by synthetic and commodified elements which create the conspicuous look of the coffin, hiding the core which remains wooden and perishable. The dead, as social material that can be transformed, allow the living to refashion the social body in an ideal, imaginative way. This ideal vision aims for, and functions by means of, an appropriation of 'foreign' aesthetic elements. These are directly associated with artificial qualities such as shiny and reflective surfaces and fabrics as well as with durable qualities. Varnish, glossy handles, golden crosses and satin come to stand for a spatio-temporal distinction from the world of the living – a world and time in which these things, although buried in the ground, are seen as durable. They retain their ideal properties, hence representing social durability. The body itself becomes encased in layers that, again and again, produce this quality of artificiality, while carefully incorporating elements that are reminders of social ties.

Dressing the Body

Alfred Yao rests on the floor. The body bag is placed on a mat, zipped open, his body visible, while the undertaking team goes through a pile of clothing that has been given to them by the family. These clothes belonged to Alfred Yao and it is important that he takes some of them with him in the coffin, as he might need them where he is going. At the same time, they are also needed to prepare the body. Before dressing, Alfred Yao's body undergoes an extensive stretching procedure. The team of three push and bend his body with surprising force to make him flexible enough to sit up straight. This takes about thirty minutes or more. During the process, Alfred Yao looks like he might still be alive, or as if Lucy and her helpers are trying to reanimate him, as if he is being led by the hands with his eyes closed. Finally, he is sat down in the coffin and, in a last effort to help him to assume a good posture even in death, his arms are pulled forward. The team who are doing the work complain and sweat, as it is hard physical labour, though they are used to the work and share occasional laughs while they go through the motions. As mentioned earlier, a dead person in Peki will usually be buried wearing several layers of their own clothing. The decorated bodily features of the deceased are almost erased by a thick layer of clothing underneath the top layer, and the body is physically enlarged by a lot of added material. Alfred Yao will be changed into two different outfits as the night progresses. For now, these clothes are not needed as Alfred Yao will wear a loose

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wrapper of *kente* fabric first. In all cases where I saw a coffin and a body being prepared, a generous stuffing of clothes from the deceased's personal wardrobe was used to fill the coffin, as a supplementary pillow (which is covered with satin so the clothes themselves are not directly visible). In some cases, a selection of clothing was brought to the undertaker in a suitcase or a bag. Sometimes, the clothing to be placed on the body was selected by a family member in consultation with the undertaker. In one case, before a female elder's body was washed at the morgue, the responsible family member(s), friends and relatives of the deceased gathered in her room and, in a painstaking and somewhat secretive selection process, handpicked some clothes and other objects that were to be included, of which some would be taken to the morgue. These personal, used and worn clothes cannot be replaced by any other clothing items, and they acquire their value precisely because they have been owned and used by the deceased before. However, while reminders of personal connections are intentionally added in the process of dressing the body, the used clothes are hidden between a layer of new underwear and another of representative costumes, which are either purpose-made or bought. They are not put on display, but hidden from view, dedicated to the deceased only, not to the living, and secreted safely between layers of more representative clothes. This is similar to the use of grave wreaths that are included in the grave and wrapped, serving a purpose in a spatio-temporal sphere that is invisible and cannot be experienced by the living. Not all the clothes and jewellery that the deceased owned can be placed in the coffin. In the Peki community, a suitcase of clothing and other smaller personal belongings is traditionally packed up, left untouched and opened for distribution by the *tɔvi* at the one-year anniversary of the funeral. The *tɔvi* may then take the items which are lying on top for themselves, and they have the job of administering the distribution to a group of relatives who are present. While I could not witness such a distribution process, I was told that these events were more public in the past and have recently become a private family affair. However, it is likely that not all family members can be present at the one-year celebration, limiting the number of possible recipients. In the end, Alfred is dressed in the costume of a king, an outfit for which a piece of family *kente* with sparkly threads is wrapped around him, leaving one shoulder uncovered, as is the custom. A crown from Lucy's collection of decorative accessories, made of metal and black velvet is placed on his head, his hands and feet are hidden. Before the curtain is raised to let people in, two young women come in to confirm that the job has been done to the family's satisfaction. Now, people flood in from the busy compound yard. They stand and speak to Alfred, circle around the coffin, wail and keep watch. Some mourners place small gifts such as photographs of the deceased in the coffin. Outside, a popular *bobobo* drumming group is playing and people stay around, listen to the drums and dance.

When I return early the next morning, I am just in time to see the pastor, who has arrived to give a short private Bible reading and a blessing to

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Alfred Yao in the presence of family members. Alfred is now wearing a formal suit with a long fake gold chain and white gloves, which work in similar ways to the decorative and aesthetic elements of the coffin: the body becomes statue-like and artificial. The props with which the body is dressed, just like the crown that Alfred wore initially, are decorative items brought by an undertaker. They may be reused in another funeral, another job. It is common practice to leave no parts of the body uncovered, apart from the face. Guests who arrive come in and say their last goodbyes to Alfred Yao. When the coffin is closed, his *tɔvi* are present. Then the coffin is taken outside, and soon a lengthy Christian funeral service led by a voluntary preacher begins, after which the body is taken to the cemetery and buried without much ado. Guests and close family remain at the house, where a sister who is a chef has prepared 'Western-style' food: roast chicken and coleslaw. Guests are given the food in modern Styrofoam takeaway containers, allowing them to eat at the house or take the food home with them, as they choose. 'Sympathizers' (as mourners are commonly called in Ghanaian English) arrive to share their condolences and partake in a bite to eat (if they donate something to the family). Food and drinks are handed out under the watchful eye of several female family members: it's a costly part of the funeral and not a serve-yourself affair. The *kenkey* dumplings that have been prepared by women of the family in the afternoon are not given out as gifts during the official hosting part of the funeral but serve to feed guests and family members who remain in the house for the next couple of days. The Styrofoam containers and chicken with coleslaw can also be considered to mark a preference for durable, synthetic materials and Western-style aesthetics – here in the form of a dish. The food boxes made of yet another synthetic material will make quite an impression, as they are a significant upgrade from the regular plastic sachets that are generally used for take-away food. Paired with a meal that is not the usual everyday food, they serve to establish the 'good' death of Alfred Yao, while the *kenkey* as ordinary everyday food feed people long-term, yet inconspicuously.

Home Liberties, Home Constraints: Points of Touch

The family house has a more liberal catalogue of rules than the morgue, a catalogue drawn up by the head of family and its residents. During the lying in state, it becomes a place where the living and the dead can meet and celebrate being together for a short while. The family compound offers a stable site for such an encounter, supported by the social institution of the family, which is inextricably tied to the building and the town community. Still, the meeting happens in a newly created, temporary space and in the presence of a decorated, temporary body for the deceased, to facilitate the touching of boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead. The room for the lying in state pops up in the house, unexpectedly, and confuses the floorplan of the house. It introduces walls where there were none before,

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hiding the room that is normally used by the living, as bedroom, storage, entrance or something else. Instead, it provides the magic and comfort of a room clad in fabric – fabric which decorates, separates and yet remains permeable to sounds, air and movement. Whether curtains or hangings, these pieces of fabric can be brushed aside, if need be, the boundaries of the room suspended or rearranged for a moment. When momentary boundaries are reimposed and the dividing curtains are drawn, the undertaker and her team have a closed-off space to do their work, uninterrupted. They are in an interim place between the world of the living and that of the dead, while being fully in control of the space. After a family member has inspected their work, the room is opened for mourners. The body of the deceased can be kept in the house without any visible regulations as to how it is treated. The morgue requires a deep freeze, locking the body behind institutional doors and transporting it in a body bag. At the family house, it can be touched, talked to and dressed in different outfits. Since those elements of the deceased as a social person that tied them to the world of the living have already been unmade during the washing and by means of decorative objects in this space, the living can touch the body and interact with it. It is, however, very common to see people make a warding-off gesture, arm stretched out, telling the spirit of the deceased not to come too close. This spirit, an element of which is believed still to be loosely attached to the body at this stage, may have some potential for harm. According to traditional belief, the spirit of the deceased, including of those who died a 'good' death, usually stays around for up to forty days (coinciding with the Christian belief regarding the period between Jesus' death and resurrection), before it withdraws from the world of the living. Hence, while the body and the spirit are becoming detached from the living and contained in a funerary setting, this is the last chance for intimate interaction with the deceased, after the body has been released from the morgue and before it disappears into the grave. And while interaction and touch are invited, allowed and sought, these are not enjoyed in an entirely carefree manner but always with the next step, the containment of the deceased, in mind.

In accompanying and helping Lucy, I found that touching the body and protecting both the living and the dead from physical contact seem to be a matter of great importance and of moral, spiritual and financial calculation. At the morgue as well as in the home, those who work with the body, touching and moving it, wear protective plastic gowns and single-use rubber gloves. In August 2018, over a year after Alfred Yao's funeral, I help dressing a body at a family home, standing in for a co-worker of Lucy's. While I have previously refrained from becoming actively involved in processes that include the touching of bodies, I now have an active role to play. As someone having this kind of tangible encounter for the very first time, I am particularly aware of the need to protect my skin from direct touch, though Lucy and her assistant only do so to a certain degree. They wear protective gloves and gowns during work but, when the body had been moved into the

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coffin and most of the skin had been covered with three layers of clothing plus a suit as the final outfit, they and relatives who attended the dressing use their bare hands to make the finishing touches. Afterwards, the gowns are folded up and packed away, to be re-used during the next job. As objects made from plastic and commonly intended for single use, gowns and gloves clearly serve a different function: they are used to mark the professional roles of those who are participating. But instead of enforcing a physical separation between living and dead bodies, they create a heightened awareness of possible touch and interaction. The process of dressing a body requires resolute physical involvement. In preparation for putting an arm of the body through the sleeve of a jacket, I am asked to bend and stretch the arm repeatedly, a task for which I must push with all my weight and power. This kind of interaction, the need to apply pressure, immediately creates a different sense of 'being in touch' with the body. Instead of it being a body that cannot be touched or looked at, it becomes a human being without any force of its own (or even possessing a certain type of negative energy, a resistance to movement). As such, this lifeless person needs help getting dressed. During the actual time the body is on display, during which guests can come and visit it, people lay their hands on a dead person's forehead, touch their clothes or stroke their hair. Often, a bucket of water and soap is placed outside at the guest's disposal, where the washing of hands also includes the arms. In a beautiful act of helping me to practically understand the work of an undertaker, Lucy's assistant washes my hands with a soft local soap after we are done with the night's work, as if to show me how to wash my hands the right way. Here, I too become a passive body receiving treatment.

Sanitary issues with respect to touching a dead body are treated differently from guest to guest and family to family. These concerns seem to come second to worries about keeping the spirit of the deceased at bay. Guests, on the other hand, can also be a possible threat to the family and the deceased, should they intend to use negative spiritual forces on the deceased's body and spirit. However, in the fabric-clad room, there are usually people present who witness other people's behaviour towards the deceased. In anticipation, people may be hidden behind the curtains, invisible yet attentive, to prevent uninvited uses of sorcery. Apart from relatives on watch, the display itself is also set out to protect the deceased. The feet and hands of the deceased are always covered in new white socks and gloves and may then be hidden under a decorative sheet. This act of protecting the dead and the living from too much proximity marks the end of the dressing phase and the beginning of an official representational phase in which the body has reached its final state of being presentable. The face remains visible as a reminder of the person's identity, such as also marked on posters and banners which prominently feature a person's face. Feet and hands carry the marks of life – scars, calluses, deformations and nails. While, even more so in death, these become deeply personal body parts which tell the story of

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how a person lived, what kind of work they did, how they moved and how they took care of their own body; this information is much too private for an official viewing. As a gesture of mutual respect, the new white underwear, socks and gloves return privacy to the dead body, which, if uncovered, gives all this private information away readily and unfiltered. Depending on the location where the body is laid in state – this could be a room in the house or a pavilion in the yard – the environment may feel slightly different. In cases where pavilions are used, a red carpet, part of the undertaker's equipment, will cover the ground. In both cases, the pavilion outside and the fabric-clad room inside create a sense of being in a theatrical setting. Everything is somehow transformed, not a part of everyday life.

As with the washing and preparation at the morgue, a combination of new, 'imported' or synthetic objects and materials – some of which might be re-used as part of the undertaker's decoration – and old, previous possessions of the deceased and various building materials that are quickly put to a momentarily different use, play important roles in the process of lying in state. It is vital that some items are brought to the scene in a new and packaged state, like the coffin or underwear and white gloves, while others need to be previous possessions of the deceased or may just be added for decorative purposes und re-used in similar contexts later. Most of the undertaker's decorative items and props are of a durable or artificial quality, even though the items themselves can be used multiple times. Lucy, noticeably, did not decorate the room with strictly traditional objects, materials or patterns. Rather, she used welded metal holders for plastic flowers (the holders being made by local metal-workers), *kente* printed cotton fabric (often a Chinese import) rather than real *kente* (which, if used at all, would be contributed by the family and usually taken back into their possession after the ceremony), and synthetic satin fabrics that have a particular shiny look and feel to them. The combination of these different kinds of objects and materials is a common denominator that presents itself in the morgue, family house and cemetery, the three locations that the dead body travels through. The qualities of 'durable' synthetic things that Lucy uses here, their aesthetics, their flexibility towards being repurposed and the interplay with belongings of the deceased leave them charged with possibilities. It is these new and somewhat 'alienating' materials and things that help to remove traces of personhood, while links to a previous life (through personal clothing and gifts) may be maintained for the sake of pacifying the deceased. The deceased are made (un)familiar through a combination of personal and synthetic materials that physically and symbolically separate them. However, the objects that transport personal ties will be hidden away from view, layered under official costumes or stuffed into the coffin under a satin sheet as the filling for a headrest.

The ability of the living to decide flexibly when touch between the living and the dead is appropriate, what parts of a dead body may be seen in what circumstances and by whom, imbues the dead body with the potential to be

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transformed. Through the decorative work that is carried out on the body at the family house, it enters a new stage of official representation and acquires a sense of dignity in death. Within this process, all aspects of the dead body come to play a role and can be recognized when it is the right moment for them. The washing pays careful attention to all parts of the body, its marks and signs that tell of the deceased's life. In its dressed-up state, the body has become a new person, the dead person, who has undergone an assisted process of revelation, transformation and guise. The face, which is highlighted with makeup, lipstick and eyeliner by the undertaker, takes the central part in the final stage of transformation. It will, as the marker of personal identity, stand in correspondence with the face(s) displayed on funeral banners, but this time with closed eyes and a closed mouth. Touch, on the level of bringing the presence of the dead into the community of the living, is regulated by representatives of the Peki Traditional Area council. Chiefs and elders have put a ban on dead bodies entering the town before dusk at 6 pm. Some bodies, such as suicide victims, are not allowed to be laid in state at all. Accident victims may be presented like any other deceased, an event which used to be taboo in the traditional context. These regulations relate directly to spiritual beliefs and mark a border, a time that is dedicated to shared space and the presence of the dead in the houses of the living. Here, constraints and liberties with regards to including the dead in the world of the living before finally containing them are imposed entirely by the family. However, a body may only reach a house after the hurdles of negotiating debts, leasing a grave, preparing the funeral and releasing the body from the morgue have been overcome. Alfred Yao's burial at the Avetile cemetery on Saturday afternoon is a quick affair. The family members who accompany the coffin are gone for about forty minutes. From several other interments that I have seen on the poor parts of different Peki cemeteries, I know that a pastor or the person who held the service is usually present, a few last words are said, and the grave is closed with soil. From then on, a poor grave will receive only minor adjustments, if at all, and the cemetery returns to its usual quietness.

Completing the Good Death Sequence

This chapter has traced the successive sequences that orchestrate the work for the dead, which laboriously moves the dead body from one place to another. Illustrating the 'good' death sequence, the narrative closely follows the funeral of Alfred Yao as its central ethnographic case study and demonstrates how the dead, both physically and spiritually, are moved towards an ideal state of being contained. Since the dead body itself would still transform – uncontrollably – if it were not attended to, containment in death leads to a sense of immobility and finality: it produces the qualities that death is supposed have, which are by no means natural. The body as corpse becomes the patient in a defined sequence of procedures and, in its

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controlled transformation, allows for a Hertzian 'social making of death' or control over death to be realized. The places, materials, objects and activities that are essential to this sequence finally allow the socially constructed and materially demonstrated containment of the body and spirit in death. They serve as material anchors and go-betweens on 'time-maps' with which the living attempt to achieve such containment while maintaining contact with the spatio-temporal world of the dead. Once these anchors have been successfully established, movement and an altered state of existence may then become possible for the dead, for example, as ancestors. In their function as ancestors, the dead stand in a personal relationship with their family members and may be interacted with if desired – they are, to a degree, owned by the living. Ancestors also have some of the abilities of the living, such as the ability to listen and possibly answer, to move around if called upon or to see parts of the world of the living, as well as to receive the gifts that have been dedicated to them. Yet, these 'living' properties of ancestors are contained and controlled, as opposed to those of ghosts, wandering spirits and possibly malicious spiritual elements, who are always at risk of causing harm with these faculties. The transition from life to a different state is reflected in the places that the dead body travels through, contrasted by the seemingly stable characteristics of these places, for example buildings, graves or the state of being frozen. In Peki, materials that are attributed with durable qualities, as well as things which are new or marked as 'Western-style' commodities, serve this purpose particularly well, aiding in the unmaking and re-making of the social person in death. It is the concern of the living to contain dead bodies at the different instances of transition, for variable durations of time, until a final containment at the 'last resting place' and a corresponding allocation of the deceased's spiritual components in their designated place has been achieved. In this process, the manipulation of the material world, in both its immobile and mobile forms, presents a way of changing the rules for the living and the dead. Such rules may first present themselves as the constraints of place and social or institutional regulations, such as an official note signed by the hospital director on the wall of the morgue. For this making and unmaking of containment in places related to death, mobile flows of bodies and things are essential.

The combination of static and mobile elements allows for a manipulation of rules that are 'in place'. They also allow for a manipulation of time, as noted by Gell (1992). Creative processes of dealing with constraints transforms the temporality of the dead into a social time that becomes navigable for the living and serves their intentions. In relation to the movement and arrest of bodies in different places throughout the funerary cycle in Peki, time and location are manipulated, resulting in an altered temporal state of the deceased. To that avail, synthetic materials and their tendential qualities play a decisive part. The dead, if attended to in the prescribed ways, can be expected to move within the limitations of space-time that have been given to them. In the making of death as a state of containment, places in the

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world of the living play crucial roles in achieving such a manipulation of space-time. When the mobility of the dead has been successfully controlled, finality or immobility in death allows for a socially navigable time in which the deceased can be included in the society of the living as ancestors: cosmological entities with a new and approved status of personhood. Cementing or otherwise containing the dead relies on material manifestations which shape places, as this chapter has shown. Synthetic material's durable properties create a body politic into which selected dead members of the community are durationally incorporated, literally cemented into the ground. This kind of durable manifestation supports the altered temporality of the dead: all pasts are equally made present and can hence be included in the social temporality of the living. Yet, these pasts and presents are also crucial in the making of futures, as heated negotiations about the moral status of a deceased show. The outcome determines how families are seen in the community, how financial relations are recognized and whose ideas will be taken seriously. Another aspect of futurity relates to the prevention of unintended harm or change. Since the dead may not always adhere to the limitations imposed on them by the living but may also transgress boundaries with the world of the living, appearing as the ghosts told of in stories, measures may be taken to prevent these kinds of uncontrolled movements. Dead bodies, spirits in tow, are moved and looked out for. Finally, they are supposed to become contained, too. Here, the physical fixation of the material body is supposed to affect the containment of the deceased's spiritual components. In doing so, the dead's 'living' time, which, according to Gell's model, is inseparably intertwined with movements and the arrest of the body, is also ultimately suspended, rendering it manipulable by the living. What can be said about all the places in town that have to do with death and funerary activities is that they are at the same time tied to Ghanaian law and financial regulations, as well as to those represented by local traditional authorities. This becomes evident, for example, in the negotiation with traditional governance authorities over being allowed to bury and lease a grave site, or in the regulation of when and how to pick up a dead body from the morgue. Commemorative practices are rich sites of political and social negotiation. They invoke loyalty and liabilities to kin and may be tied to claims of land ownership or obligations towards the community, such as participation in community labour. They facilitate the practicalities of everyday life. In these matters, local authorities successfully compete with the state, making their relevance in Peki known by structuring funerary events and imposing constraints on the process.

At the morgue or at a public town cemetery, different regimes of regulations and interests can be represented, contested and altered by individual actors. Engagement with the dead body and with the environments in which it is contained, administered, washed, decorated, presented and buried marks points of transition. These do not appear in a neat, uni-directional line, although sequences intend a course of action in a prescribed temporal

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order. In fact, as this chapter has shown, while the living attempt to control the passage of the dead, the deceased's bodies and spirits are, to a degree, also allowed some movement, whether in their intended state as ancestors or during the funerary process. There are intended instances when dead bodies and the living touch. These interactions occur as movement controlled by the living, but it remains necessary to transport the dead onwards successfully, containing them while possibly imbuing them with the agency of ancestors or wandering spirits. Having control over the material environment, material change, and evaluations of the material is, as Hertz has shown, a way to reclaim control over apparently uncontrollable processes, such as death. From what I observed in Peki, the questions of control or authority over interpretations and practices relating to the material environment and the dead body are ultimately tied to questions of power and the pursuit of personal or collective intentions. Yet, with many different actors and agendas involved – since 'the social' is much more diverse than the Hertzian approach suggests – these agendas are always subject to negotiations, often not in direct 'verbal' form, but rather by means of practices and socially shared evaluations. Individual actors may choose, highlight and interpret qualities of the material for specific reasons. However, they may equally be restricted by materials when their power over these matters declines or the material world stubbornly gets in the way of human intentions. Such processes of interpretation, interaction and negotiation can be represented through the art nexus model, where human intentions, the realm of the material and agency are connected in a nexus of relations, rendering the dead indices of ideal social relations (Gell 1998). However, this ideal outcome is always at risk of being challenged when other perspectives take agency in the process. Here, 'bad' death and the incontrollable elements that it unleashes serves as the counterpart to the conservative efforts of the 'good' death sequence. Part III of this book will outline the sequence for 'bad' deaths as well as several alternative sequences, including all those relations that are less than ideal or out of control but still inscribe themselves into the indexical position of the dead, albeit with different results.

Notes

1. Pseudonym.
2. See Chapter 1 for a detailed description of this kin role.
3. There have been governmental policy change interventions in the past with the aim of encouraging people to bury their relatives quicker and free up space in morgues. Among them was a defined maximum stay time after which the price for each day went up. This apparently motivated people to move their deceased relatives from morgue to morgue when that threshold of maximum days was reached. I have not witnessed anything like this during my fieldwork in Peki, nor been told that people had to move a relative due to external regulations.

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