SPEAKING OF ART:
A GIRIAMA IMPRESSION

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THE ALAN P. MERRIAM MEMORIAL LECTURE
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It is appropriate for a number of reasons that Indiana University has instituted the Alan P. Merriam Memorial Lectures in Anthropology. And it is particularly appropriate that the first lecture was read during the 24th Annual Meetings of the African Studies Association and that the theme of those meetings was The African Humanities.

First, Alan Merriam was a Founding Fellow of the African Studies Association and member and Chairman of the Committee of Fine Arts and the Humanities. He was without question a major force in the development of studies in the African humanities.

Second, he was Co-Founder of the Society for Ethnomusicology and a guiding spirit of that Society and its Journal from 1952 until his death.

Third, the title of what is perhaps his most significant publication is revealing: The Anthropology of Music.

Thus we have Merriam the Africanist, Merriam the Ethnomusicologist and Merriam the Anthropologist. But it must be noted that he insisted on describing himself in precisely the reverse order of that listing: primarily as an Anthropologist, then as an Ethnomusicologist, and only thirdly as an Africanist. From discipline to specialty to geographical area.

On a more personal note, Alan was a man of strong opinions and stronger convictions. Not surprisingly, during our twenty years of colleagueship we frequently argued, sometimes vehemently, and often publicly. We both enjoyed our debates in the African Studies seminars we taught together at Indiana University. Indeed, in recent years our disagreements were conducted totally in public for we felt that argument worked well as a pedagogical device; in private we had long since agreed to disagree. I can assure you that from my point of view and I trust from Alan's, private amiability and public discord resulted in a marvelous friendship.

In his role as Chairman of the African Studies Association Committee of Fine Arts and the Humanities, he was instrumental in the formation of a landmark panel at the African Studies Association meetings exactly twenty years before this first Alan P. Merriam Memorial Lecture in Anthropology was delivered. The title of that session was Arts, Human Behavior and Africa. A paragraph from his

introduction to the panel which was published as Vol. V, No. 2, May, 1962, of the African Studies Bulletin, summarizes his attitude toward the arts and humanities, and can serve as a goal for the lectures that will bear his name and honor his memory:

> The African arts, then, are viewed...both as artistic product and as human behavior whose ramifications spread throughout the societies and cultures of which they are a part. The holistic view of the arts must encompass both facets; we trust that by emphasizing both, the role of the arts in African life and in African studies will be more clearly understood.

Roy Sieber
Professor of Fine Arts
Indiana University
June, 1982

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David J. Parkin

In commemmorating Alan Merriam, we pay tribute to a scholar whose achievements were remarkably ahead of his time. It is difficult to realize that his influential work, The Anthropology of Music, was published in 1964. He stressed in that work the need to break down the barriers between the different humanities at a time when others were defending disciplinary boundaries. He had the ingenuity to want to study music, not as incidental to the analysis of, say, politics, kinship, and economics, but as a phenomenon having its own creative autonomy, and as able to comment on society and not simply be moulded by it. The creativity in music he saw as essentially that found in the visual arts, oral literature, dance, drama, and architecture. Let us take that creativity as our starting point, he said. Don't let's start with the definition of our interest in the narrow terms of an established discipline. Yet Merriam was perfectly well aware of the importance of the nature of the society in which music, and more generally, artistic creativity is expressed. He had, after all, worked on a range of social organizational problems among the Basongye of Kasai Province in what is now Zaire, and among native Americans in Western Montana, and had read widely into ethnographies drawn from Africa, North America, and Oceania.

He therefore saw that while music and art generally might express something about society, it also responded to society. Music was basically stable but could adapt and change, with the potential for change varying between cultures. At root was the individual performer or composer who had the freedom to innovate yet would do so on terms allowed him, so to speak, by his culture. One of Merriam's arresting hypotheses was "that change and receptivity to change will be more frequent in those cultures which stress the importance of the individual composer as opposed to those which receive their music materials from a fixed superhuman source" (1964:305, and see Chs. IV and IX especially). As he put it, change in music derives...."in great part, at least, from the concepts held about music within the culture" (1964:306). The individual is thus a product of his conceptual system and is even constrained by it, yet he or she is the conceptual system for it is he or she who articulates it.

This fusion of person as both subject and object has always been a difficult notion for the social sciences, yet it is of course a basic assumption we have to make about human creativity. We dream of new possibilities and make them come about, and so alter the so-called "objective" conditions of our existence. This concern inevitably takes us, then, into peoples' own indigenous theories of existence, a field of cross-cultural philosophy which we have been remarkably slow to enter. Using the insight provided for us by Alan Merriam, I want to enter this field, not as an ethnomusicologist nor as an art historian but as a somewhat eclectic social anthropologist.

I need make no apology for using data from only one society to illustrate one people's consciousness of themselves as free to create yet bound by each other. For, in yet another lesson, Alan Merriam taught us the value of detailed and carefully researched ethnography, which he saw not as an encyclopeadic listing of cultural attributes but as a dialogue between the fieldworker and the culture which interests him.

For instance, when we look upon the anthropomorphic memorial posts drawn from the Giriama of Kenya on view here today, there are probably three broad questions that come to the mind of Africanists. First, the historical one. How did the Giriama develop this distinctive interest? And how far do we search for possible links with the Oromo gravestones of northern Kenya and Ethiopia or with those of Madagascar of which, in the words of one scholar, the Giriama ones "are intriguingly and persistently reminiscent" (A.W. Southall, personal communication). The second broad question seeks, with disarming simplicity, the significance for the Giriama themselves of these memorial posts. For and by whom are they placed and for what purpose? Our response to their answer is, paradoxically, the third question: do we fully believe what the Giriama say their posts are for, or do we add and impose our own interpretations?

I will not deal with the historical question but with the last two. Put in this cryptic form they are, of course, a summary of issues that trouble the humanities today. And for a few moments I would like to address myself to them before going on to talk about the Giriama.

In history, art, literature, linguistics, and anthropology, in all these, we debate the question: do rules govern form and behavior, or are these rules little more than our own analytical constructs born of a wish to tidy up the sometimes inconsistent remarks of those we study and to satisfy our aesthetic concern with elegant theory? The reaction against the view that social behavior, artistic form, sentence construction, and literary narrative are rule-governed has been called by at least four names: interpretive, hermeneutic, post-structuralist, and deconstructivist, and, possibly a fifth, phenomenological. Though hermeneutic philosophy can at least claim to have existed as such long before any of us were born, its modern revival in the work of Foucault, Ricoeur, Derrida, and others parallels the other reactions against the view that different appearances can be explained by an underlying logic.

All reactions are, by definition, expressions which go too far. And, seeing this, I now wonder whether it is not time to re-consider how far rules, logic, and underlying structures do in fact constrain the boundless creativity which many in the humanities now claim as their sole interest. Of course, in saying this, I am aware that it is still possible to find scholars of the humanities who have still not read deeply into, say, structuralist writings. They may feel that it is now not worth the bother, if the heyday of structuralism is past. To them one might say that to abandon totally the idea of underlying regularities as an equal focus of our interest is to deny that to which, in our everyday behavior, we actually subscribe. Who can deny the implicit understandings that bind peoples of a single culture and enable them to think in terms of the same metaphors? Metaphors are the basis of natural communication and yet they depend on the recurrent nature of homology, homophony, and homonomy, all of which draw on a symmetry of underlying thought structures. The paradox surely is that in our self-conscious attempts, as scholars, to be infinitely creative, we inevitably build structures, not all of them new ones either.

Deconstructivists at least would agree and simply argue that the moment a structure (i.e. a "theory") takes shape it should be destroyed, lest like a square room it over-determines

the possibilities of our movement. That is fine as far as it goes. Yet why should we not also pause to reflect on these momentary structures, those striking and often thrilling homologies which we seem to glimpse in fieldwork or texts and which, while they need not be the eternal basis of thought and action, are nevertheless worthy of our equal attention? Victor Turner has referred to communitas as those moments out of time and out of the regularities we call structure. I am reversing this and seeing apparent homologies as fleeting structures, only fixed in our view of the flow of society as if in a snap-shot. Both Turner's and my perspectives are possible. More than this they are complementary, for both are alternating aspects of the way we view society, a text, a work of art, or historical events: we perceive enduring symmetries but also momentary ones.

I want to explain this snap-shot view of structure by discussing the Giriama memorial posts, and the parallels and metaphors they evoke among the Giriama and among outside observers like myself and others such as travellers, missionaries, and administrators.

It has been noted since the early years of this century that the memorial posts, or vigango (sing. kigango), are found among most but not all of the quarter million Mijikenda-speaking peoples: the Giriama, Kambe, Ribe, Kauma, Chonyi, Jibana, and Rabai, but not among two of them, the Digo and Duruma (Prins 1952-90 citing Werner 1915: 343; Hollis 1909: 145; and Johnstone 1902: 33,41). I shall, however, for reasons of time, confine myself to the Giriama.

First I want to suggest that though the focus of Western interest is on the vigango posts as "art-objects" we cannot understand their cultural significance unless we look also at the smaller, very ordinary-looking ancestral sticks with which they are sometimes found. Ernie Wolfe has provided a photo of these two types of ancestral memorial and neatly calls the cluster a "visual kinship chart".

The Giriama sometimes try to keep the ornamental vigango posts and the smaller ancestral sticks together in one place called the kigojo or men's conversation hut, which is to one

end of the homestead compound. Some important past members of the family are, so to speak, thereby, kept in continuing contact with present senior male members.

The ancestral posts and smaller sticks are not normally placed at the time of the burial, nor at the site of the grave itself (pace Prins 1952: 88-89). There is therefore an interesting spatial and temporal separation of memorial site from grave site. Graves are dug within the homestead compound at a few paces in front of the door of the deceased's house. They are sometimes marked by a stone or tree. That is the only visible sign and even that is uncommon. Immediately after the burial, in fact, the grave mound is deliberately flattened during the many funerary dances. Persons dying from a "bad death", literally "death from war" (kufwa kwa viha) such as murder, falling from a palm tree, a car accident, or being struck by lightening, are buried outside the compound. The bodies of both men and women should be placed on their right side with the eyes facing north to Shungwaya, the homeland of all the Mijikenda (Spear 1978). Such explicit rules vary among other Mijikenda sub-groups but together make up a pattern of different possibilities. Graves are dug within twenty-four hours of death, depending on the time of death and according to a strict timetable.

The memorial posts and sticks are supposed to be placed within a year of death but, to my knowledge, are often placed much later and only when a brother, son, or grandson is visited in a dream by the spirit of the deceased. By this time the buried corpse may have decomposed, a point of some relevance as I shall show.

The spatial and temporal separation of the grave and memorial site is said to separate the deceased's body and spirit. The body (called mwiri in life and ufu in death) belongs to the grave. The spirit (koma) belongs to the memorial post or stick, where it is propitiated when things go wrong in the family homestead.

Though the grave and memorial site in this way express the separation of body and spirit, each becomes tied to its respective territory. The grave is, of course, never moved.

The ancestral memorials, too, are restricted in their movements. The small, ordinary-looking ancestral sticks are never moved. Some say that the larger, elaborate kigango post must be abandoned in its original position even when the family shifts to a new site. Others say that the post, or a less elaborate substitute of intermediary size, may be transplanted to the new site, but that only one such transplantation is permissible.

It is tempting to regard the inclusion of ancestral memorials in the men's conversation hut and the restrictions on their movement and on their transplantation as an attempt literally to keep an eye on them, not so much to control the spirits which inhere in them, as to be in a ready position both to negotiate with them, and, more benignly, to greet them regularly, perhaps daily, with libations of palm wine. Indeed, by the time this is happening the spirit and its wooden memorial are closely identified, and become in effect the same thing. This is evident in the use of the word koma (makoma pl.) to refer to the small ancestral stick as well as to the spirit, a conjunction which Giriama themselves explain as such. Similarly the large ancestral vigango posts are seen to take on the animate power of those to whom they are dedicated.

The spirit, in other words, may by now have lost its mortal body of flesh, blood, and bones, from which it was separated, but has taken on a new body of wood; tall and elaborately carved in the one case, and small and plain in the other. Reintegration has occurred.

The idea that obligations, duties, affections, and fears inhere in an ancestor's second body is a powerful one.

In my own homestead (that of Johnstone Muramba) a series of misfortunes and deaths was followed by a heavy rain-storm which washed away some soil in the compound and dramatically revealed the stub of an old decayed memorial stick, believed to be that of the (elderly) homestead head's father's sister. A sacrifice was performed for the spirit of the lady and the misfortunes ceased. No one had known a stub to appear in this way and this ancestral propitiation was seen as equivalent to

those normally made at younger, still preserved memorials during times of misfortune.

In spite of the claim that personal spirits never die, it is normally the case that, within three or four generations, they and their material representations may be abandoned and effectively forgotten by descendants of the original family living away from the site. This is of course consistent with the fact that the Giriama have shallow lineage genealogies, place more organizational emphasis on alternating named generations than on unilineal descent, and have always migrated frequently within Giriama country. Why should they then bother to carry so much memorial baggage around with them, especially since, as some Giriama claim, it may later be used to re-claim land if left where it is?

What happens to the spirits once their wooden bodies are eaten by termites? Giriama point out that the word koma , as well as referring conjointly to the spirits of persons and their memorial sticks, can refer to the countless unremembered spirits (pl. makoma). The Giriama do not say, however, that these disembodied, wandering spirits turn into the capricious, non-human possessionary spirits called peho (pl. mapeho) or nyama, though, since the latter term also means "meat" or "flesh" and is the root of the term for "animal," such a development from human to non-human is at least suggested. Nor do ancestral spirits ever turn into the nature spirits (mizimu pl.) which live at the base of large trees such as baobabs and in caves.

As the wooden post or stick, i.e. the second body, "dies," so to speak, from abandonment, negligence, or the termites, so the ancestral spirit becomes not itself "dead" but simply irrelevant. By this line of thinking, the vigango with us today were sold at a stage when the spirits inhering in them became irrelevant to other Giriama but by no means dead. There has, so to speak, been a second separation of spirit from material body, comparable to the separation that occurs when a corpse is allowed to rot in the grave while the dead person's spirit is allowed to wander until and if it visits a brother, son, or grandson in a dream and is given a new body in the form of a wooden memorial.

Ancestral spirits which have lost their wooden memorials and those which were never given them in the first place seem ordinarily destined to be disembodied forever. But spirits which once inhered in the longer-lasting but now abandoned vigango do at least have the chance of re-entering it. Thus, though the vigango in this building may have become separated from the ancestral spirits which once possessed them, they could surely be repossessed if the names of those ancestors to whom the vigango were dedicated could be recovered and if, say, they became the focus of a Giriama cultural or national movement. In preserving the vigango we are in a sense conserving the possibility of their re-birth as powerful agents, a point to which I shall return.

The relevance of raising this admittedly unlikely possibility is to draw attention to what is really at issue in any discussion about vigango and koma ancestral memorials. Not every person who dies has a koma placed to him or her, and it is expected that whoever does will have been of at least genealogical significance in his or her lifetime. But to have had a kigango placed for him requires a man to have had a very special status in Giriama society.

These distinctions of significance and status point to the wider role of the vigango in what can be called a philosophical debate about destiny.

I can begin to draw the outlines of this debate by emphasizing the striking visual contrast between the crudely cut and unembellished small, koma sticks, and the often richly elaborate vigango sculptures. Koma sticks may be placed to deceased men or women, each distinguished by different clothes and sometimes also by a curve carved in the neck of the stick, possibly in a phallic style, to denote a male. For the most part, though, they are really no more than short sticks up to a foot high made from the relatively soft wood of the mukone or muhumba trees which are not impervious to termite infestation.

Though the honorific vigango are elaborately carved and much more imposing in appearance than the koma, their impact on ordinary people, though dramatic, is limited to the fewer

occasions on which they are placed. The koma sticks, by contrast, in being laid for the spirits of ordinary people, are more frequent aspects of everyday life. To depict the contrast between the kigango and the koma stick as that of aristocrat and commoner is dangerously ethnocentric but at least vividly conveys the general picture. The events surrounding the placing of a koma stick, however, are in some ways prototypical of those surrounding the kigango. Let me then begin with the koma sticks.

Giriama emphasize, and cases I have bear this out, that the koma sticks are often planted following a misfortune sent by an ancestral spirit and not just because the person has died. A close, deceased relative or spouse, though especially grandparents and parents, might come to you in a dream after the misfortune, saying, "Son (or whoever), I am tired of being left outside in the cold,...". As Giriama put it, the dead relative is really asking for a koma stick and some clothes to make him into a "person" (mutu) and to give him a "house" to live in. The man or woman who had the dream and the deceased relative must be fairly senior, probably married with children, before the matter may be taken further. In that event, a ritual expert is brought in together with the most senior male agnate of the man or woman who had the dream. The ritual expert addresses the deceased person by name holding the stick which, as Giriama say, is still only a stick, (kibao), and not yet a spirit (koma) and converses with him or her: "You, Muramba, have asked me not to be left out in the cold, you complain of hunger and thirst and are tired of living out in the open... Your son (or whoever) has come to put you in a house with clothes and food..." The stick is then placed, so enabling the spirit to become, metaphorically in our eyes, a person. This ceremony must take place on either of the two auspicious days of the Giriama four-day "week". Failure to meet with the spirit's wish can, in extreme cases, lead to death, and the spirit is also asked to abate his or her resentment. The emphasis is on mutually satisfactory dialogue with the spirit and among family members.

A goat or two chickens will be sacrificed and eaten. It is explained that the animals may be of either sex, large or small, since all the spirit wants is the blood and not the meat

of the animals. Seven cooked but unsalted pieces of, say, goat's liver and breast are placed at the line of ancestral sticks. The senior male who planted the new stick and seven local children who are not agnates will sit and eat a little maizemeal bread (sima). This bread must not otherwise be eaten by any other married persons, for to do so will destroy the relationship of the spirits to the sticks, i.e. destroy them as "persons". Once the children and the senior male have eaten, the women present add salt to the meat which must then be eaten by everyone present, if only a morsel. The Giriama say that they choose children to eat the first part of the meal because they are innocent of sex. In this ritual, then, the consumption of maizemeal falls to "sexless" children, the old spirits, and the man who has just re-incorporated the new spirit, while that of meat, which the spirits reject, is the preserve of all others. The underlying theme is that the new spirit, in refusing to eat the meat, has finally renounced the mortal flesh or meat that once covered him or her and has taken on the new body of wood offered him and, through his acceptance of life-giving blood and his association with young children, has been bodily re-born.

Thereafter, the spirit or koma can be most helpful. For instance, you may pray to him or her at night for successful crops, perhaps slaughtering a goat or chicken to him and offering the blood and some maize flour ground by your senior wife.

The installation of a kigango, too, follows a dream and sometimes also a misfortune. Again, blood rather than meat is offered. There is the same theme of the bodily re-birth of the spirit. The man responsible for commissioning a carpenter to carve the kigango, and for organizing and paying for the installation, is the seniormost agnate of the deceased other than his son. Like the koma stick, the kigango is placed facing west, the direction associated with death.[1]

What makes the installation of kigango distinctive is the presence at the ceremony of members of the exlcusively male Gohu society, for it is only to deceased members of this

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[1]Champion (1967:25) notes that the vigango of the once ritually important Kiza Social section faces east.

society that a kigango is placed. Beforehand, and sometimes many years beforehand (ten in one case I have), the deceased Gohu member will have had a lavish funeral conducted on his behalf, to which fellow Gohu members will have contributed generously. At the funeral of one Gohu in February 1978 (in the Gotani area), thirty bullocks were sacrificed and eaten, which was far in excess of other funerals at the time.

A second distinctive feature is that, though the theme of bodily re-birth is the same as for the ordinary koma, the Gohu's spirit possesses an altogether more ornamental body in the form of the kigango, the preparation of which is directed to its long-term preservation. First, it is made out of such durable hard woods as that of the muhuhu tree and others, which, except for the bark are not eaten by termites. Two vigango standing abandoned in maize fields near my own homestead dated back to the early 1880's and, though much rotted, were still recognizably anthropomorphic. Second, the care taken in decorating the sculpture suggests long term considerations.

The carved triangular motif characteristic of the kigango is, of course, found in many other parts of Africa and will evoke different interpretations according to the society in which it is found. Carved into the Giriama kigango, it might represent the body's ribs, or perhaps the intertwining of ropes or even snakes around the body, and sometimes arranged to look like the snuff container and chain worn around the neck of some elders and itself making up a triangular pattern. Care is also taken to paint the incised triangles in patterns of red, white, and black. Though the triangular motif is basic enough, the degree to which it can be elaborated to form patterns along and across the body-like kigango is considerable. Vigango also vary in height, say from three feet to nine feet, each topped by a flat, disc-shaped, and even three-dimensional head, which, in the past, might have two silver dollar pieces inserted as eyes. The durability of the wood used in its making and its detailed ornamentation are clearly intended to ensure that a Gohu's second body will outlast those of other ordinary spirits.

To many Westerners this apparent attempt at a permanent or long-lasting personal memorial is familiar and perfectly

understandable. To others, the fact that a person's spirit or soul lives forever makes it unnecessary and even idolatrous to represent it materially. Discussion of the virtues and vices of physical representations of soul runs of course through many religions. The contrast between the koma and kigango and the relationship of the Gohu both to ordinary people and to other important Giriama, addresses itself to this issue. As I shall show, the Gohu represent an attempt to control immanent force openly through permanent, material, and visible means, while there are others who control it secretly and only on specific occasions. Together, the two modes of controlling immanent force, the one by physically, visibly, and permanently concentrating it, and the other by tapping it only as occasion demands, reveal the two dimensions according to which all Giriama must act and think.

But who are the Gohu and with whom are they engaged in a struggle over hidden forces?

To answer this we must say something both of the Gohu and the other four main Giriama special societies. Of these five societies, four are for men and one for women. But this sexual division is not the most significant for my analysis. More important is the way the societies complement each other at different levels.

At one level the men's Gohu and the women's Kifudu society fit together in a manner that marks them off from the other three.

Both are concerned with two things: the conspicuous collection and distribution of property, and marital relations. The men's Gohu donates, consumes, and distributes food at feasts; the women's Kifudu, nowadays at least, conspicuously donates not food but money and invests it in communal enterprises like schools and nurseries (i.e., projects affecting children) under the modern rubric of Kenya's Harambee self-help movement. Also, the Gohu society attempts (or traditionally did) magically to prevent wive's adultery (Champion 1967: 23), while the Kifudu helps and advises younger women in marriage, often through the use of medicine and protective and vengeance magic, and tries to ensure sound conjugal relations, sometimes

by bringing marital disputes out into the open.

The main occasion when women from different neighborhoods can meet is a funeral, at which they dance the famous Kifudu song, in which women singers caustically lament male inadequacies, often through brilliant obscenities, but may reserve some praise for a particular chief or headman. This is one of the ways the Kifudu brings issues out into the open.

As well as complementing the Kifudu women's concern with material re-distribution and with relations between men and women, the Gohu men also intentionally engage in publicity. Their feasts are lavish but not exclusive, indeed they are intended to be a means of advertising the Gohu as wealthy and yet generous individuals. This conspicuous consumption and redistribution brings out into the open the fact that a few individuals have acquired quantities of cattle, land, and wives well above the average. As is well known, material aggrandisement by individuals in many African societies conflicts with a strong egalitarian ethos. For one man to succeed while others remain poor invites resentment and witchcraft or, alternatively, casts him in the light of a witch who has benefitted by others' deaths and misfortunes. This is a familiar theme which is especially characteristic of politically uncentralized societies of which the Giriama is one.

But, while the Gohu are rich, and so might be resented, they also re-distribute food at their feasts, and so may also be seen as benign. They are therefore, regarded with some ambivalence: some Giriama refer to them as concerned only with their own "greed", while others admire their ability to have transcended the normal lot of humanity.

Gohu embody some of the characteristics of the modern small-scale entrepreneurs as well as the traditionally successful men. Both wish to increase their control over property and to transmit it to successive generations. But among modern entrepreneurs the priority is to expand holdings of land, trees, shops, vehicles, or whatever, and to beget children as the means by which such property is retained. Few children is often better than many for this purpose and so many entrepreneurs prefer to marry only one or two wives. The Gohu reverse this

priority: land, livestock, and wives are called "property" but are the means by which children are secured, for to be reproduced permanently, so to speak, through one's offspring and their descendants is the object of existence. The more children, the better. Property is the means to that end, not an end in itself.

This emphasis on many wives as fertile producers of many children for a potent husband is reflected in the culmination of the ceremony marking a Gohu member's transition from the grade of novice (umondo) to senior (ubora).

The Gohu candidate wears, on his wrist, an armlet made of buffalo horn, called a luvoo. On the night of the ceremony, his senior wife must slip the luvoo up above his right elbow where it should stay for ever (Champion 1967:23). According to one report, she does this while they have sexual intercourse, with the armlet reaching the top of his arm as he reaches his climax (Ngowa Mwadori to Ernie Wolfe). According to the same modern source this ceremony of investiture occurs when a kigango is placed for a dead Gohu's spirit, again emphasizing the principle of continuity. An early report gives the fee to be paid as consisting of a bullock, ample beer, (nowadays, palm wine), maizemeal bread, tobacco, and castor oil seeds (Champion 1967:22), referred to in later years as a kind of bridewealth (hunda), and constituting the basis of the ceremonial feast.

The people invited include other Gohu elders, of course, and also the seniormost elders called Vaya, whom I discuss later. The same early report speaks of other invitees being of the candidate's own patriclan and also of those of his mother and son-in-law (Champion 1967:23). Interestingly, invitations to funerals also start out on the basis of these relationships, with each clan then inviting their affines who invite their affines and so on. This partial funerary idiom is continued in that both modern (Ngowa Mwadori) and early (Champion ibid) sources describe how the candidate's hair is shaved, which is normally expected of close relatives of the deceased at his burial, and is then plastered with millet or maize paste, into which patterns are drawn. It is difficult to resist the interpretation that the Gohu investiture combines

elements of different rites of passage: the candidate's head is shaved as an expression of bereavement for the departed Gohu whose kigango is being laid; and the candidate pays a fee which is likened to a bridewealth which marries him, so to speak, to the society (chama). Yet, just as the placing of the kigango enables the spirit of the deceased Gohu to be bodily re-born, so the Gohu candidate undergoes a physical metamorphosis which transforms him from an umondo junior to an ubora senior: patterns are drawn into the flour paste on his head, he wears the armlet of buffalo horn, he is given a new cloth to wear, and, according to one report (Champion ibid), ostrich feathers are placed in his ears.

This human bodily decoration uncannily parallels that given to the wooden kigango, the spirit's new body. The ceremony transforms one body and consecrates another. Recalling Sperber's interpretation of butter placed on the Ethiopian Dorze dignitary's head as evoking conspicuous consumption (1975: 59-61), the placing of flour paste on that of the Gohu candidate can be seen in the same light, especially since, as I suggested earlier, lavish material display is one of the hallmarks of Gohu status. The use of bone, here in the form of the armlet, and of hard wood, here in the form of the kigango, have been regarded elsewhere in Africa as symbols of continuity and permanence, even immortality (Biebuyck 1973) and the parallel is also worth noting. The wider parallel or homology is that of a mortal becoming a fully integrated Gohu, and of a deceased Gohu's spirit becoming integrated with a body.

Though my informants claim that Gohu candidates have to be influential elders wealthy enough to pay the fee and to keep up the feasting (see also Smith 1976: 54), Ernie Wolfe has seen younger Gohu, though whether they have achieved or inherited their positions is not yet clear (personal communication). Certainly either possibility is consistent with the basic openness of the organization and ethos of the Gohu society.

Though it is true that even when alive the Gohu are ambivalently envied for their wealth yet admired for their generosity, they continue to be regarded ambivalently when, some time after their death, they "become", so to speak, vigango. As a kigango, the Gohu is capable of protecting the family,

just like the ordinary koma, but is also, if wronged, capable of exacting vengeance. He can protect and punish like the koma, but more so. In this sense, too, he is more open: you know where you stand with a Gohu. Even the term kigango etymologically reveals a clear basic meaning. It comes from the verb kuganga, with a core meaning of to bind together or to repair or splice a broken stick. From that meaning comes that of to cure, generally. Linked to it are the terms uganga, meaning therapy, and muganga, a doctor, which are, of course, prevalent in related forms over much of Bantu Africa. Kigango is basically translatable as an instrument of cure.

The term which, in a sense, mediates a transition from the openness and basic goodness of uganga, the kigango, and the Gohu, is muhaso. Muhaso comes from the verb, ku-hasa, to bless and to pray, and means medicine, which can be good or evil depending on the intentions of those who use it. In connoting either honest or evil intention the term is a bridge from the openness of the Gohu to the closed-in, secret, and sometimes sinister world of the seniormost elders, the Vaya.

The male Gohu and female Kifudu societies both give and distribute food and funds collectively as I have described. But the Vaya is one of three societies which empower individuals to administer oracles and oaths between disputants for a fee and to sell magic to people wishing to protect their property or person from thieves and evildoers. These three societies, the Vaya, and the more junior Habasi and Kinyenzi, are recognized by Giriama themselves as providing the regrettably necessary instruments of litigation and protection.

The Habasi and Kinyenzi are open professional societies. Almost any mature man may join if he pays the fee. He receives instructions on the nature and administration of oaths, oracles, and magic, and is then free to practice. His success thereafter is of his own making. Some get better reputations than others.

The Vaya society is not open. First, only the most aged elders are eligible. Second, each significant Giriama section of clans should be represented. Third, numbers are limited. Fourth, potential recruits are approached by existing Vaya elders. They do not themselves apply. Fifth, there is, as

with all the societies, an internal division between novices and experts, but the experts constitute an inner circle among the Vaya who possess awesomely powerful medicinal, magical, and ritual secrets. Sixth, this inner circle, sometimes called the "elders of the hyaena" (azhere a fisi) live or are based in the traditional Giriama capital, called the Kaya, which is enclosed by a forest and not normally entered by other Giriama.[1]

Though the identity of individual Vaya elders may be known by other Giriama, their secret activities are not. The hyaena oath, as it is called, is the most feared of all. It consists of liquid made from leaves and will kill the unrepentant evildoer to whom it is administered. Some of the other oaths are also drunk or swallowed but the hyaena is believed to be by far the most efficacious. The Vaya possession of the hyaena oath is associated also with their right to play a friction drum, called the mwandza, which emits a far-reaching and frightening, roaring sound.[2]

Though feared, the Vaya are regarded as necessary. The very recognition of their necessity evokes in Giriama a recognition among themselves of their own human fallibilities. On the one hand, Giriama say, "The Vaya are only after fees and sometimes act as witches, for they have the medicine (muhaso) to do so." But, on the other hand, "The Vaya are our government and are those who can know for certain who the witches and thieves among us are." The Vaya, in other words, can abuse their powers but are still the most reliable restorers of human order. Speaking as a Giriama, I might say: Even if the Vaya's ways are secret and unsanctioned, in the end they are all we have to restore our morality. In spite of their own failings and excesses, the existence of the Vaya elders both evokes our confessions of sin and reminds us that the wages of continual sinfulness are death, as a case I have shows:

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[1] See Kilifi Political Records. Volume I. 9 July 1913. "The only secret society among the Giriama is the Vaya, which is confined to a certain number of priviledged elders...other societies are not secret, and are 'open' to all members who have made the requisite payment."

[2] Likened to the howling of a hyaena (Smith 1976: 45).

/ A young man (of Chalani) was often drunk and beat his wife. His father warned him that he would be bewitched if he carried on like this. The son agreed and said he was himself tired of his excessive drinking. He asked his father to call the Vaya elders to administer the hyaena oath. The son drank the oath, promising never to take liquor again. He abstained for a year until he was tempted to take some palm wine at a funeral. He became sick and after some time was heard crying like a hyaena. Vaya and other traditional doctors said they could do nothing for him at this stage. He died six months after his lapse./

The hyaena-like crying of a sick person is always regarded as a sign of inevitable death. But Vaya reverse the effects of broken oaths if they are summoned before this stage is reached. The Vaya are clearly not saints nor even priests in the Western mold, and are in some respects sinister. Yet they are also the ultimate arbiters of personal morality.

Some, perhaps most, of the Vaya are clearly recruited from the Gohu, which is the second most senior society. There are numerous vigango in the Kaya which testify to the fact that some Vaya elders were also members of Gohu. But, while the ordinary Gohu are generally regarded as benign, those few Gohu (and they are very few) who become Vaya enter a truly secret and intimidatory society rather than an ostentatious open one. Since very few Gohu ever become Vaya, the opposition of inverse characteristics persists. The fact that even a few benign Gohu can become sinister Vaya is a neat reminder of how a worldly, open attempt to control personal destiny can be turned into secretive control.

The distinction between Vaya and Gohu is remarkably reminiscent of that of Skorupski between magic and science (1976:62). For Skorupski magic is the realm of invisible casual connections, while science is that of observable ones (to put his point very simply). The Vaya hide their methods of cause and effect which are therefore invisible to outsiders. The Gohu express their attempt at immortality concretely and visibly in the ceremonies and installations of vigango, including status-awarding feasts. The feasting demonstrates Gohu capacity to have transcended two things: the normal lot

of ordinary Giriama through enterprise, thrift, and many wives and children; and the evil intentions of jealous witches. In this respect they transcend the power of the Vaya themselves who, as I said, are believed capable of witchcraft. The few Gohu who become Vaya compromise, so to speak, this challenge to Vaya authority by admitting the ultimate superiority of hidden control of immanent force as wielded by the Vaya.

That the Gohu try to bring issues of power and influence out into the open is apparent both in their emphasis on personal flair and style, in their behavior and feasting, and in their vigango which are, therefore, part of the attempt publicly to elaborate self. Gohu are saying, in effect, that they are personally in control of their own selfhood. The acceptance of Vaya authority by ordinary Giriama represents the contrary, fatalistic view: that the development of selfhood is ultimately in the hands of others.

I would not push Skorupski's characterization to the extent of saying that the Vaya are magicians and the Gohu positivist scientists, (nor would Skorupski make such a crude equation). We can better view the two approaches to the treatment of life and death, the Vaya one fatalistic and authoritarian, and the Gohu one negotiable and meritocratic, as complementary aspects of a single epistemology. Some forms of knowledge, call them beliefs if you like, depend for their efficacy on hidden assumptions, like those of the Vaya, while others are most effective when explained, like those of the Gohu. In holding their feasts and installing their vigango, the Gohu explain and evoke explanations of their prowess: work hard, invest in wives and children, courageously stand against jealous witches, and seek a kind of lineal immortality by that route. Standing in a complementary relationship to each other, the Vaya and Gohu offer ordinary Giriama these two perspectives and the possibility of choosing one or the other as a main determinant of self-development.

The two constitute, in fact, the outlines of a continuing debate to which ordinary Giriama contribute. Giriama do question what they regard as inadequate explanations of, for instance, personal and family misfortunes. They do also cover up failures in the explanatory system of oracles and diviners by elaborating

a secondary explanation, as we all do at times. But they do not do so all the time for all occasions. Some diviners' explanations are rejected as inappropriate. People alternate between use of traditional and Western medicine, and between Islam, Christianity, and animism. If secondary elaboration was always the response to failures in the explanatory system, epistemologies would never change, yet, patently, they do, though not, of course, necessarily in the same direction.

The emergence of modern Giriama entrepreneurs is a case in point. They are not exactly modern re-expressions of the Gohu, but they incorporate the Gohu need to stand out against the jealousy of witches and to turn custom to their own advantage rather than be constrained by it (Parkin 1972: 62). From comments made by Giriama, I suggest that the contrast of Gohu with Vaya gave early entrepreneurs a glimpse of a new status possible in the emerging cash economy. Modern Giriama entrepreneurs, and those who judge them, remark how, in order to succeed, one must balance the need to give customarily generous feasts like the Gohu, and the need independently to assert one's own ambitions and claims, if necessary in the face of such traditional wielders of authority as the Vaya.

The parallels made between Gohu and modern entrepreneurs, including progressive farmers, are only occasionally made and may as easily be denied by other Giriama who think the identification preposterous. They are in that sense glimpses of debatable and partial possibilities, snap-shot pictures of a structure in the making. But that they are possible at all lies in the more commonly talked-about, more regularly structured, opposition of Gohu to Vaya. In other words the opposition of Gohu to Vaya inspires new metaphorical parallels, e.g. of progressive versus conservative, of Christian versus animist, of educated versus illiterate, and so on, which may become realized because they are seen, through retro-constructive interpretation, to be grounded in long-established tradition.

This process of entelechy, of realizing potential, provides then the snap-shot pictures of structures which are clearly more than just excursions into temporary, unrealistic, and unrealizable communitas.

Just as the opposition of Gohu to Vaya is thus relevatory, so within the constitution of the Gohu individual there are complementary insights into what a person may or may not become. It will be remembered that the kigango can be regarded as the re-embodiment of ancestral spirit. But this is my analytical phrasing and emphasis and, at first, Lévy-Bruhl appears correct in arguing that for people like the Giriama ideas about the unity and separation of spirit and body, or of "ghost" and "corpse" in his terms, are first "felt" rather than cognitively distinguished in any precise way (1975: 1-5). The sentiment or "feeling" that the corpse of the newly deceased and his/her spirit or soul "participate" or share in each other in an indeterminate way is surely experienced to some extent by all of us. Those who overcome this feeling that the corpse and spirit share in each other and who can, apparently quite happily, work alone in morgues and funeral parlors are the curious exceptions. Among Giriama the sometimes indeterminate locus and boundaries of spirit and body are evident in the casual way in which people refer to a koma stick or kigango as the person to whom it is placed, perhaps tapping the wooden memorial gently as if affectionately. In the sense of Lévy-Bruhl's "participation" or mystical bond, the wooden object is the person.

It is also perfectly clear that the Giriama can regard the wooden object as simply a memorial to the spirit which can be abandoned if necessary and even eventually sold.

Indeterminacy of spirit and body thus exists alongside their precise differentiation. But in fact spirit and body are only differentiated as such when people talk about the possibility. This can of course be when young Giriama, seeking traditional knowledge, and anthropologists, ask leading questions about death and spirits. Or such talk can occur when, for example, a relative commissions a carpenter to make a kigango for a deceased Gohu and discussions ensue as to whether the object is appropriate and worth the money paid for it.

In other words, it is really only in such matter-of-fact contexts that people are likely to distinguish spirit and body as separable entities. There is certainly never a particular need to do so. More commonly, when addressing

an ancestral spirit, it simply makes sense to talk to the koma stick or kigango. And it is certainly therefore not inconsistent for Giriama here to think of the wooden memorial as the spirit rather than simply a representative of it. Far from being an act of pre-logical participation in Lévy-Bruhl's sense, this treatment of the wooden memorial and spirit as a unity is not only commensensical but also logical.

It is, I think, a Western, Judaeo-Christain obsession to distinguish eternal souls from the mortal flesh in which they are believed clothed, or, more prosaically, to distinguish moral mind from venal body. On both biological and epistemological grounds this inflexible duality seems to me to be far less logical in the face of our knowledge about ourselves. It imposes itself on the natural fears and sentiments we have of the dead and dying: the body does not matter, we are told, for it is the soul that lives eternally. Yet it is clear from the care, grief, love, and expense lavished on mortal remains that the body does matter and continues to embody our spiritual relationship with the deceased. We are also inconsistent. For while we argue religiously that the soul lives eternally, we deny this privilege to the mind, as in decisions on potential transplant donors, yet it is through the presence or absence of evil intentions, assuredly a mental phenomenon, that the soul's future is ascertained. With regard to moral intention mind is soul, yet from the viewpoint of brain surgeons, mind is also part of body, while, as I have suggested, from an everyday, often less reflective viewpoint, body is part of soul.

Of course, what is really at the heart of Western confusion is the over-discrimination of categories which remain undefined in relation to each other. We distinguish mind from body, and body from soul, but do so in different semantic contexts which, subjected to scrutiny, are logically inconsistent.

The Giriama normal indeterminate mixing of body and spirit more sensibly covers a range of logical possibilities: spirits are capricious as well as benevolent; and they demand new bodies, food, drink, and warmth. In other words, they are imperfect moral beings, like their living descendants, and sensibly choose the provision of bodily comforts as the evidence of filial piety.

The dead most likely to be commemorated are those who were the most influential and demanding when alive. In continuing to be remembered and make demands, their ancestral spirits are only trying to ensure for themselves a continuing high level of comforts, wishing to avoid, we might say, any lowering of the standards of death. The vigango might remind Giriama that such practical benefits do not have to end with death and may be worth aspiring to. As with the distinction between Gohu and Vaya, the vigango mark possible choices open to men, and through their sons, women.

Lévy-Bruhl's idea of pre-logical thought, then, really turns out to refer to snap-shot structures or debatable possibilities, which our insistence on precise categories may prevent us from seeing. Surely the first is more creative than and demands a response from the latter.

When men and women speak to and of the vigango they are speaking of what we call art, for the vigango are indeed aesthetically pleasing, but they are also debating what we may call the problem of fatalism and control by others as against the possibilities of self-fashioning. In referring, ethnocentrically, to the vigango as works of art, having a life of their own and inspiring both serious and jocular comment, we may perhaps add to the Wittgensteinian view of art as a form of life and suggest that the vigango are also important participants in on-going discussion about life before and after death. We are, again, ethnocentrically, used to thinking of discourse being about art. We may well regard the vigango as art-objects, but, by taking into account the philosophy of the people in whose world they were originally significant, we have here a case of art speaking back, not just to the Giriama, however, but to us all assembled here.

In straddling two philosophical worlds in this way, we do more than simply reverse the relation of subject and object, by becoming talked to by those we had earlier planned to investigate. We also dissolve the distinction between subject and object and re-cast it as the exchanges of a wider discourse.

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