AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF AIDS ON FUNERAL CULTURE IN MALAWI

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Social research on AIDS is beginning to look beyond the causes, treatment, and prevention of the disease to its impacts on society and the economy. This article looks specifically at the impact of AIDS on funeral culture in Malawi. Statistical methods, basic ethnography, and focused interviews were employed to document changes in funerary customs and attendance patterns. Because of rising death rates from AIDS, Malawians are facing increasing difficulty in attending every funeral in their village, as custom requires. This is leading to selectivity in funeral attendance, stemming from a prioritization based on underlying cultural values. Families of AIDS victims are also facing difficulties in coping with the expectation to provide a funeral feast, given that funerals are far more numerous than before the onset of the AIDS crisis. This article demonstrates the importance of adapting both old and new methods to understanding the multifaceted AIDS epidemic. Key Words: HIV/AIDS, Malawi, funerals, economics, medical anthropology

The majority of social research on AIDS in Africa deals with the causes, treatment, and prevention of the disease, which is currently estimated to affect over 26 million people in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2003). There is, however, increasing interest in the consequences of the epidemic. Lori Bollinger et al. (2000:5), for example, report that the increasing number of funerals in Malawi caused by AIDS has resulted in increasing absenteeism from work. This, along with time spent training replacement workers, decreases revenues and hurts the economy. Besides affecting employers, this loss of productive labor to funerals is also felt at the household level (Stokes 2003) and the national level (Gama 2003). Scholars are beginning to expand their focus of inquiry, in addition to economic effects, to the impact of AIDS on culture itself. Thus, rather than asking what cultural practices affect the transmission of HIV/AIDS, some observers are now asking how AIDS affects the culture. In Malawi, Brian Ligomeka (2003) of the *Malawi Standard* newspaper highlights the increasing reticence among Malawian patrilineal groups to uphold the traditional practice of the levirate, in which a widow is married to her deceased husband's brother or other male relative in order to sustain the family name and protect her from poverty. This trend is likely related to fear of contracting AIDS. A 2002 United Nations study showed the impact of the AIDS epidemic on the distribution

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of inheritance in Malawi, with relatives starting to claim and divide the spoils even before the victim is dead, a practice called "property grabbing." Also, a report by Ellen Schell of the Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance discusses the proliferation of commercial coffin shops, as well as the cultural impact of the orphan crisis precipitated by the AIDS epidemic (2003).

In this article, I focus on changes in funeral procedures and the rituals surrounding death in Malawi. Because of people's reluctance to speak openly about AIDS, documenting changes in funeral culture is a proxy for studying AIDS directly. Specifically, this article focuses on the cultural values that influence how funeral attendance patterns are changing, with a brief overview (culled from open-ended interviews) of additional changes in funeral culture.

The southern African region (including Malawi) has the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the world (Ligomeka 2003). In 1999, it was estimated that more than 70 percent of the hospital beds in Malawi were occupied by HIV/AIDS patients (Bollinger et al. 2000:8). Because AIDS is so widespread in Malawi, the impact of AIDS on cultural practices surrounding death and dying should be particularly great. In July and August 2003, I studied these practices in Malawi to determine the effects of the AIDS epidemic on funeral culture.

BACKGROUND

My study focused on the community of Njolomole, an Angoni village in Ntcheu district, central Malawi. According to missionaries who have lived in Malawi since 1954, burial ceremonies in Njolomole involve detailed protocols, ranging from the way caskets are made and holes are dug to who must attend and which roles specific people must play. Traditionally, every community member attends every funeral in the area. School classes are cancelled without official announcement of the fact, and all work ends so that everyone can attend the ceremony (Gorden Doss, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

During the course of my research, I attended a funeral ceremony in Waiyatsa village (under the prefecture of Chief Njolomole). Early in the morning, young men had been sent to dig the grave. The rest of the villagers composed three general groups: those in and around the house of the deceased, women preparing for the funeral dinner at a nearby house, and men, the majority of whom were sitting around in the shade chatting and waiting for the funeral ceremony to begin.

A church choir sang, clapped, and danced around the house of the deceased until the ceremony started. Not many people initially entered the house, however, to ensure that no one with intentions to practice black magic would get near the body, which had been laid on a mat in the front room. Only when the village headman's assistant stood up and invited the general public in for a final viewing did people file through the house in large numbers, wailing and holding their heads in their hands. Following the viewing, the church choir carried the coffin into the house, shuffling and swaying to their music. Young men also entered the house to transfer the body, and the family of the deceased

followed behind, lamenting and mourning. Meanwhile, funeral attendees gathered in a nearby open-air plaza for the ceremony itself.

The ceremony consisted largely of grandiloquent speeches by prominent people in the village. The village headman's assistant welcomed the crowd and then enumerated all the good things that the deceased had done during her lifetime, following with an explanation of the cause of the woman's death and an acknowledgment of those who helped the family prepare for the funeral. Another speech consisted of a young man reading a long list of gifts that had been brought to the funeral (along with the name of the benefactor) as an expression of support for the bereaved family. This public accountability encourages everyone to give, and not to be stingy about it! It also discourages stealing, as everyone in the village knows precisely which gifts have been given and should be accounted for after the ceremony is over.

Next, the village headman warned the people that if anyone had killed the woman through witchcraft, God knew. "If you bewitched this woman and you are here today, you are very unfortunate," he intoned. "One day, it will happen to you, too. We all go to church, we all claim to be Christians, and yet some of us still do such things," he said.[1] The main funeral sermon continued in a similar vein. "Many of you are Christians," shouted the preacher, "but you practice witchcraft, you commit adultery, you fly at night, you take the form of animals!"[2]

After some congregational singing and prayer, the village portion of the ceremony was over. The entire ceremony had been routinely punctuated by outbursts of anguish from relatives of the deceased woman; those who could not get themselves under control were sometimes escorted away by someone sitting nearby.

After the coffin was tied to a stretcher, it was hoisted up and carried toward the graveyard by some young men. The village headman led the procession, and the choir sang all the way to the graveyard. When the headman reached the graveyard, he opened a simple pole gate that only he is allowed to open. If anyone is found beyond that gate other than during funeral ceremonies, he or she will be suspected of witchcraft and ostracized by the community. At the graveyard, the young men used rope to lower the coffin into a deep pit. Then a young man climbed into the pit to prepare the coffin for burial. The coffin was wrapped in reed mats, and the measuring sticks used to acquire the dimensions of the body for coffin construction were laid alongside the coffin (to prevent them from being used for witchcraft). After another speech and prayer, all available young men grabbed shovels and hoes and started filling the grave as the church choir sang. Village elders scanned the crowd to ferret out any young men who were not participating so they could enlist their help.

After yet another speech, prayer, and song, the village headman dismissed the women first, who were followed by the men and finally by the village headman himself. He closed the gate and followed the men a good distance from the graveyard. About halfway to the village, the women sat down by the path and allowed the men to pass. Then, the men waited by the side of the path until the village headman passed, so he could once again lead the procession back into the village. At the halfway point, there was a large oil drum full of water where grave-digging tools and diggers' hands could be washed clean of any evil spirits before entering the village. Once back in the village, freshly plucked

branches were used to sweep the coffin-making area and funeral cooking area to prevent the practice of black magic in those spots.

This account highlights the importance of ritual and protocol in dealing with every detail of death in the region of Njolomole. However, since the arrival of AIDS, several cultural shifts have taken place. For example, coffins are increasingly being made in advance of death, and coffin workshops maintain a brisk business in sales of premade coffins. In the past, coffins were never made before a death occurred, whether for a child or an adult, as doing so would signify not wishing the ill individual a recovery. No matter how close a person was to death, there was always hope that he or she would recover (Ronald Mataya, personal communication, May 20, 2004). But now, the accelerated pace of deaths caused by AIDS has fueled the premade commercial coffin industry, as local coffin makers are unable to keep up with the growing demand.

An additional cultural shift brought about by AIDS is that funerals have become far more numerous than before, sometimes occurring more than once a day. No longer is everyone able to attend every funeral, and teachers now hold classes during funerals, and farmers tend time-sensitive crops instead of attending burial ceremonies. Village elders commonly berate funeral nonattenders for this "degeneration of society" to the point that proper respect is not shown for the dead (Gorden Doss, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

These cultural shifts raise several important questions. How do Malawians reconcile their cultural desire to show respect to the dead with their need to contribute significantly to the workforce? How are Malawians coping with the increased economic and societal pressures brought about by skyrocketing death rates related to AIDS?

METHODS AND RESULTS

To understand how residents of Njolomole cope with the problem of attending so many funerals, I elicited free lists on "reasons for attending a funeral." (For information on free lists, see Brewer 1993; Gatewood 1983; Smith 1993.) I wanted to generate a systematic random sample of villagers, but there was no census to work from, and maps of Njolomole were not available for cluster sampling. Given the remoteness of the village, telephone sampling was out of the question. I used a variant of the space sampling method (Bernard 2000; Duranleau 1999; Handwerker 1993, 1999; Lang et al. 2004; Mukhopadhyay 1999). Starting at the center of the village, I randomly selected streets and walked in a straight line toward the edge of the village. Using a random number generator, I initially visited every *n*th house on that straight line, interviewing the first adult I came in contact with at each house. However, this resulted in a disproportionate number of women being interviewed. My research assistant explained to me that men tend to be away from home often, wandering the streets or drinking in bars in the afternoon, after attending to their *dimbas* (wet gardens). To balance the gender representation without introducing bias, I altered my strategy to interview every *n*th person I encountered on the street. This captured the wandering men—as well as women who were at the mar-

ket or on their way to or from water sources. I also varied the time of day at which I went out for interviews, so as to balance each person's chance of being interviewed.

Ultimately, I collected 23 free lists from Njolomole residents based on the prompt "Name all of the reasons you can think of for attending a funeral." I analyzed these data using the free list option in ANTHROPAC (Borgatti 1992). Taking the 12 most frequently listed reasons, I constructed a ranking questionnaire that asked respondents, "If there were too many funerals in your village so that you could not attend each one, which of the following reasons would be the most important in helping you decide which funerals to attend?" Then, the 12 reasons were listed with a blank next to each one where respondents could indicate, from 1 to 12, the importance of the reason (with 1 being most important and 12 being least important). ANTHROPAC created questionnaires with a different listing order for each reason, so as to minimize ordering bias. Using a similar sampling strategy as before, I administered the ranking questionnaire to 30 people. The results are shown in Table 1.

Looking strictly at the column sums (*R*-scores), it would appear that the general order of importance for various reasons when considering which funerals to attend is as follows: reciprocity (REC), to help the family with preparations (HEL), to console the family of the deceased (CON), sorrow (SOR), ego is a relative of the deceased (REL), custom (CUS), to bring a gift (GIF) and to say good-bye to the deceased (GOO), ego is a member of the same church as the deceased (CHU), ego is a friend of the deceased (FRI), to carry the coffin (COF), to eat the funeral feast (EAT). The ordering tells us only which items received a higher ranking than the others but not whether that difference in rank is significant. GIF and GOO were ranked about the same when considering which funerals to attend (there is no significant difference in the importance of these two reasons, which both received an *R*-score of 207). This preliminary finding, however, led to several questions. Were there other reasons that, although receiving a different rank sum, were also ranked similarly enough to be considered insignificantly different? Did *any* of the reasons stand out significantly from the pack, or were they all close enough to render the ordering of reasons useless?

First, I used a Shapiro-Wilk Test to determine if the hypothetical underlying population of rank sums was normal. My null hypothesis stated: H_o: The underlying population is normal with mean μ and variance σ^2. The alternative was: H_a: The underlying population is not a member of the normal family. Using the formula $W = b^2/([n-1]s^2)$, I found that $W = 0.0009368$. Choosing $\alpha = 0.05$, my $w_{0.05} = 0.859$; the rule states that we reject H_o in favor of H_a if $W < w_\alpha$, so I concluded that the underlying population did not fit a normal, bell-shaped distribution. Nonparametric statistical methods were needed in order to determine which (if any) reasons listed for attending funerals were significantly different from the others.

Next, I ran a Friedman Test to determine whether or not certain reasons consistently stood out as being more influential in helping people to decide which funerals to attend. My data were in a block design (respondent versus factor), and there was complete independence among respondents. The factors themselves, however, were not independent, for each respondent ranked each factor. Because respondents were asked to rank each item qualitatively using whole integers, I did not have quantitative information about

TABLE 1 Rankings of 12 Reasons for Attending a Funeral (1 is Most Important, 12 is Least Important)

	1 REC	2 SOR	3 HEL	4 CUS	5 REL	6 EAT	7 FRI	8 GIF	9 CON	10 GOO	11 CHU	12 COF
1	4	1	2	7	6	12	11	8	5	10	3	9
2	1	5	12	4	11	7	3	2	8	9	10	6
3	4	5	3	9	2	12	11	8	6	1	10	7
4	3	4	2	10	5	12	6	7	1	11	9	8
5	2	11	3	10	4	12	5	6	1	7	8	9
6	3	8	9	2	7	12	10	6	5	1	4	11
7	1	8	10	6	5	12	7	4	2	9	3	11
8	3	7	5	8	1	9	2	11	4	10	6	12
9	3	2	4	11	1	12	8	5	7	10	9	6
10	1	5	3	2	10	12	11	8	4	7	6	9
11	2	4	7	1	5	12	11	6	3	8	9	10
12	1	2	4	6	9	12	8	5	7	3	10	11
13	3	4	1	5	11	9	7	6	8	2	12	10
14	4	10	2	6	1	12	7	9	3	8	5	11
15	2	5	3	1	11	12	10	9	4	6	8	7
16	5	3	6	4	11	12	8	7	1	2	9	10
17	7	4	8	6	9	12	10	3	5	1	2	11
18	1	8	3	6	5	12	4	11	2	7	9	10
19	5	4	1	8	9	12	3	7	10	11	2	6
20	1	10	2	11	8	12	5	4	6	3	9	7
21	5	2	8	7	6	12	1	11	4	9	3	10
22	3	4	2	1	6	12	7	9	5	11	8	10
23	1	3	5	11	7	12	10	2	4	6	8	9
24	12	10	5	8	1	11	2	7	3	4	6	9
25	2	1	7	3	4	12	8	10	5	9	6	11
26	1	7	3	2	5	9	8	6	4	10	12	11
27	1	4	2	9	5	12	8	3	11	7	6	10
28	1	7	4	2	5	12	9	11	10	8	3	6
29	3	4	9	5	1	12	2	8	6	10	7	11
30	1	2	4	6	5	12	11	8	3	7	9	10
	R_1=86	R_2=154	R_3=139	R_4=177	R_5=176	R_6=345	R_7=213	R_8=207	R_9=147	R_{10}=207	R_{11}=211	R_{12}=278

how much more important a given factor was over another. However, I was still able to use the Two-Way Layout Analysis via Friedman Ranks precisely because this test is based on ranks, regardless of the magnitude of difference between ranked items. The understanding is, of course, that if I were to press respondents for precise measures of differential magnitude, they would give me measurements from a continuous population.

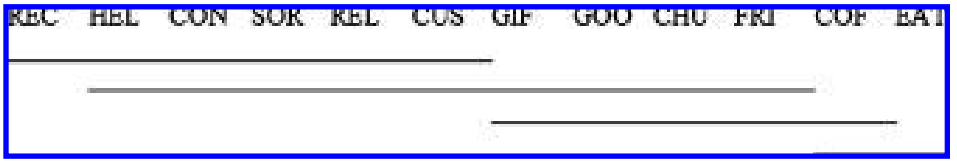

Figure 1. This figure shows which reasons were significantly different from the others. If any two reasons are connected by any line, then they are not significantly different from each other. For example, the first line indicates that none of the items REC through CUS were significantly different from each other. However, combining the information from the first and second lines, it can bee seen that HEL, for example, was not significantly different from GOO, while REC was.

Note: The following abbreviations are used for the 12 main reasons given for attending a funeral: REC = reciprocity (attending a specific person's funeral so that his or her family members will attend your family's funerals), SOR = sorrow, HEL = to help the family of the deceased with funeral preparations, CUS = going out of custom, REL = going because ego is a relative of the deceased, EAT = to eat the requisite funeral feast, FRI = attending because ego is a friend of the deceased, GIF = to bring gifts to the family of the deceased, CON = to console the family of the deceased, GOO = to say good-bye to the deceased, CHU = going because ego is a member of the same church as the deceased, COF = to carry the coffin.

Thus, my null hypothesis was: H_o: All τ_j's are equal. My alternative hypothesis was: H_a: The τ_j's are not all equal. I used the formula $S = [12/(nk(k+1))\Sigma R^2_j] - 3n(k+1)$ and found that $S = 128.06$. Because this is a large sample for this method, I used large-sample approximation, which states that I should reject H_o if $S > \chi^2_{k-1,\alpha}$. For $\alpha = 0.05$, I compared my S to 19.68, which led me to reject H_o. The p-value for my S was <<.001, meaning that there were significant differences in the importance people placed on various reasons for attending funerals.

Finally, I wanted to determine which reasons were significantly different. Using a distribution-free, two-sided, all-treatments multiple comparison based on the Friedman Rank Sums, I used $\alpha = 0.05$ to determine what my q_α would be; plugging q_α into the formula $q_\alpha[(nk(k+1))/12]^{1/2}$, I determined that any two ranks were significantly different if their difference was ≥91.277 (the number calculated from the formula above). The results of my comparison are compiled into Figure 1.

I also applied consensus analysis to the rank-ordered data (Romney et al. 1986). Consensus analysis computes an informant-by-informant similarity matrix from the informant-by-item profile matrix and then computes the principal components of the similarity matrix. The factor loadings of that analysis, which range from 0 to 1, indicate how closely each informant comes to the consensus response profile for all informants. A factor loading of 1 means that the person's rankings match the consensus rankings exactly. A loading of 0 means that none of the respondent's ranking data matches the consensus ranking. A person with a loading of 0.965 has more knowledge about this cultural domain—reasons for choosing to go to a funeral—than does a person with a loading of 0.234 and is said to be more culturally competent about the domain.

I used ANTHROPAC to run the consensus model and was able to identify which of my 30 respondents were the most knowledgeable about funeral culture. I later interviewed these most knowledgeable informants (MKIs) in depth. I was also able to identify

respondents who tended to have out-of-the-ordinary views about funeral culture. Later, when selecting a small group for in-depth open-ended interviews about alterations in funeral culture, I selected informants from the most knowledgeable group. Thus, using consensus analysis, I focused on knowledgeable rather than marginal informants. This practice could be dangerous, if the most marginal members turned out to be the equivalent of shamans. That is, they may have such highly specialized knowledge that they appear to be out of the mainstream of culture. It is common for people who have specialized knowledge to protect that knowledge if it is the source of their livelihood. It is possible that the marginal people I encountered were indeed specialists in funeral practices. However, even if they were excluded because of their specialized knowledge, the MKIs I selected were still more knowledgeable than the average Njolomole resident regarding funeral practices.

DISCUSSION

The results of my analyses of strategies to cope with funeral attendance expectations indicate a hierarchy of reasoning in the decision-making process. Reciprocity was chosen as the number one consideration when deciding which funerals to attend. Even though it is not significantly more important than the first six reasons listed, it is interesting to note that the fifth and sixth reasons ("relative of the deceased" and "custom") had *R*-scores that are 90 and 91 points more (respectively) than that of reciprocity. Recall that our cutoff value for significance is 91.277 with $\alpha = 0.05$. If the α-level were only slightly higher, reciprocity would be considered significantly more important than the last eight reasons listed, instead of just the last six. As Rosnow and Rosenthal once said, "Surely, God loves the 0.06 nearly as much as the 0.05" (1989:1277). In any case, we see from Figure 1 that the second through sixth reasons are not significantly more important than the seventh through tenth, whereas reciprocity is. In fact, the biggest pool of reasons that are not significantly different from each other includes all but reciprocity (at the most important end of the scale), to carry the coffin, and to eat (at the least important end of the scale).

What does reciprocity mean? It could refer to a desire to create a sense of obligation in others (one goes to a funeral so that others will attend one's own funeral when one dies), to diminish a sense of obligation toward someone else (someone goes because the deceased regularly paid respects to one's relatives when they died), or both. In any case, the effect is the same: a person is most likely to attend the funerals of (1) those he or she feels most indebted to or (2) those in whose family he or she wants to create the greatest sense of obligation to return the favor. Thus, when Njolomole residents are faced with the dilemma of too many funerals to attend because of high mortality from AIDS, the importance of reciprocity in influencing their decision trumps even friendship or bidding farewell to someone they once knew.

Why were "to carry the coffin" and especially "to eat" ranked so much less important than the rest of the reasons listed? Open-ended interviews with the MKIs (those who had

the highest cultural competence scores on the consensus analysis) revealed that manual labor, such as grave digging and coffin carrying, is the domain of young men exclusively. Thus, carrying the coffin was listed frequently in the initial survey as a reason that someone might attend a funeral but was chosen rather infrequently as the reason that a given respondent would attend. If my sample of respondents had included more young men, I expect that "to carry the coffin" would have ranked higher on the list of importance; a young man might choose one funeral over another because the chance to participate (through coffin carrying or some other form of manual labor) would be greater.

Why would a young man prefer participation in a funeral over nonparticipation? According to the MKIs, one stressful side effect of the dramatic increase in funerals is that families have to bear the burden of preparing the obligatory funeral feast more often. They have less time than they used to in order to recuperate from the burden of feeding so many attendees before their next relative dies. As a result, a hierarchy of eating is becoming established; those at the top of the hierarchy eat first, the second-highest hierarchical group eats next, and so on until the food runs out. Thus, those at the bottom of the hierarchy sometimes do not get any food at funerals anymore, but, at least, the most important people are not put out by the food shortage. It turns out that young men are fed first, followed by the rest of the attendees in hierarchical order. This is because few people want to dig graves or carry coffins—it is hard work. Young men are enticed to attend and participate in the manual labor of funerals by being guaranteed generous nourishment in exchange. If they were not assured that they would be well fed, young men might be hard to recruit. One can also see why someone would choose between funerals based on the chances of food running out before it was their chance to eat. It is interesting to note that when the free lists were gathered, few people initially mentioned eating. Many people seemed to think the question was focused on them specifically ("Why do *you* attend funerals?"). To get around this problem, I repeated the questionnaire prompt whenever each respondent ran out of ideas. However, on this second reading of the questionnaire prompt, I changed my emphasis: "Why would *anyone,* not just you, attend a funeral in Njolomole village?" I made sure to add this emphasis on the second reading for each person I interviewed, so as to minimize the bias that might result from dissimilar questionnaire prompts. Most of the listings of "to eat" resulted immediately after the focus was taken off of the respondent. The swiftness with which people mentioned eating after the second reading of the questionnaire prompt suggests eating to be a common yet socially unacceptable reason to attend a funeral. People did not want "to eat" to be associated with their own motives for attending, although they were quick to mention this reason when speaking of others. This, I believe, explains its frequency of listing but its low importance of ranking (an exercise that *did* specifically focus on the respondent).

Many of the MKIs also mentioned another coping strategy when faced with multiple simultaneous funerals: attend a small portion of each one. In fact, all but one of the MKIs (who was sick) reported having attended at least a portion of every funeral in the previous two weeks—even two that were scheduled for exactly the same time in neighboring villages. This show-your-face-and-leave strategy is itself a change in custom, even

while paying lip service to the custom of attending every funeral. I was unable to determine how widespread this practice is, but it is possible that this strategy is highly correlated with people who are the most knowledgeable about their funeral culture. In other words, these people may be MKIs because they still attend every funeral; conversely, they may attend portions of every funeral because they are most in touch with the importance of doing so, according to custom. It is also possible that people reported having attended every funeral because it would be an embarrassment to admit not having done so.

Other changes in funeral culture were also highlighted by various MKIs. In the past, children who were too young to help with manual labor were forbidden to attend funerals. They were locked in the house during funerals because young people were not supposed to have knowledge about such things. Keeping children away from funerals was also a preventative measure so that children would not be frightened by the ceremonies. Funerals were rare at the time, and children were ignorant. Now, however, because funerals are so common, they are not considered secret anymore. Children know about death from an early age, and they freely attend funeral ceremonies with the rest of the village.

Another young man explained that people are dying too much because they are disobeying God. In the past, people were careful about funerary rituals, but now they are becoming more lax. In other words, the increase in deaths led to a decrease in detailed observance of funeral rituals, which led to more deaths (out of punishment from God). This sentiment was echoed by a woman who said that if people try to change the rituals themselves, they will call down the wrath of the ancestors, the ones who gave them the rituals in the first place.

Mourning has been curtailed, as well. Several villagers used to stay at the house of the bereaved family for up to a month following the ceremony to show support and provide assistance adjusting to normal life again. Now, people typically spend a only a few days to a week showing support in this way, because the volume of funerals is too great and places too much strain on this social care system.

CONCLUSIONS

HIV/AIDS is seriously affecting Malawian culture. It is causing changes in customs and traditions that have been in place for generations. Because of rising death rates related to AIDS, Malawians are facing increasing difficulty in attending every funeral in their village. This difficulty is leading to selectivity in funeral attendance, stemming from a prioritization based on underlying cultural values. The greatest concern in trying to select which funerals to attend appears to be reciprocity, the desire to fulfill one's own obligation to others or to create a sense of obligation in others to return the favor of attendance. Another coping strategy appears to be attending short portions of every funeral. This does not fully live up to the cultural expectation of complete attendance at every funeral, yet it provides a way to be seen in all the right places without a loss in time and productivity.

As this article demonstrated, new research methods are becoming available that can greatly assist in understanding the impact of HIV/AIDS on culture. Even while using the time-honored anthropological traditions of participant-observation and open-ended interviews, the researcher can add new methods that provide a more complete understanding of the issue at hand. It will be increasingly important in the coming years to adopt and refine these methods in order to adapt to the challenges encountered in attempting to understand the full impact of the AIDS epidemic worldwide.

NOTES

1. My research assistant estimated that more than 95 percent of villagers in this region are Christians of some kind and that those who are not Christian do not belong to any organized faith.

2. Flying at night is a reference to possessed people translocating to wherever they wish to be. Taking the form of animals refers to the practice of impersonating a hyena (most commonly) so that one can more easily steal a goat or some other food animal. It is believed that if someone shoots such a "hyena," the animal's body will fall down dead and remain in the place where it was killed. The next time someone sees that person, he or she will have a bullet wound in the same body part where the hyena was wounded.

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