Death and the diaspora: the everyday necropolitics of belonging

Ben Page (UCL), Claire Mercer (Leicester) and Martin Evans (Leicester)

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Structure
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“Movement reflects a growing inability of individuals to remain in place. Yet, the very sustenance of specific places themselves requires movement.” AbdouMaliq Simone (2003) Moving towards uncertainty: migration and the turbulence of African Urban Life

‘As critical geographers we should therefore seek to remember and reconnect the spaces, places, homes, and, indeed, graves that have been thereby forgotten with those that are repeatedly remembered.’ Kris Olds, James Sidaway, and Matthew Spark (2005) Editorial Society & Space
1: Introduction: Death and the diaspora

A few days after the July 7th bombings this summer, news began to reach me in Dar es Salaam of the death of Gladys Wundowa who was killed on the number 30 bus in Tavistock Square, London. She had left her family home in Essex, shortly after 4am to begin work at the engineering department in UCL at 5am. Like most of UCL’s cleaning staff she arrived at work long before most academics or students and had left before we stumbled in to work. After four hours work she went to catch the bus. Though conscious after the explosion, she died from injuries on her way to the hospital. She was born in Ghana, and had come to London in 1981 with a Lebanese employer (The Guardian, July 16th). Later she became a British citizen and married another Ghanaian who was a trained architect turned security guard.

Gladys Wundowa volunteered at the African Development Agency in Dalston, a charity offering counseling and advice to the African community. Such institutions are critical to the construction of a diaspora. As Marina Oussatcheva writes ‘it is via institutions that a diaspora discourse, which creates the image of community, diasporan culture and consciousness is produced and disseminated’ (Oussatcheva, 2001). After her death they issued the following statement:

"Gladys was universally loved and we will miss her greatly. She volunteered here all day, every day and she has never been late or absent. I have never seen her angry and when people came in with problems with housing or immigration she was always happy to help."

Dr Adu Seray-Wurie, head of African Development Agency, Dalston

She worked at UCL for 16 years as ‘a cleaning services operative’ and several days a week after work she went to Hackney community college, where she was studying housing management. Her aspiration was to escape from the drudgery of life as a cleaner and work instead for a housing association. I had, of course, never knowingly met her. The Estates and Facilities division at UCL currently employs around 150 full and part time cleaning staff, (in addition to a number of specialist cleaning contractors), many of whom are immigrants. Given the invisibility of the cleaning staff to most of us at UCL, the relatively anodyne press releases after Gladys Wundowa’s death from the head of Cleaning and Waste Services, the head of engineering and the Provost were probably more appropriate than anything more emotional. Even so, I hope that after my death I am not reduced to a bullet point.
“I very much regret having to confirm the following as a consequence of the explosions in London on 7 July 2005:

- Mrs Gladys Wundowa, a cleaner at UCL since 1989, is confirmed missing
- Professor Philip Patsalos, of the UCL Institute of Neurology in Queen Square, is seriously injured.”

Malcolm Grant, Provost of UCL

“During the 16 years she worked at UCL, Gladys made many friends who knew her both professionally and personally. She was a loyal and long-serving member of our team and she will be very much missed. Our thoughts are with her family, friends and colleagues at this time”

Sue Godsell, Head of Facilities Services

"We were terribly shocked to hear the news of Gladys' death in the bus explosion on Thursday. We extend our condolences to all her family, both here in the UK and in Ghana. Gladys was a kind and generous person and was a happy and conscientious employee. She will be greatly missed."

Nick Tyler, Head of Civil and Environmental Engineering Department

An official book of condolences was opened and a collection for her family was made amongst staff and there is now, I believe, discussion of a permanent memorial. The sincerity of UCL’s sentiments of concern for her family were slightly undermined by the fact that they accidentally released news of her death before her family had actually been told by the police, so her husband discovered she was dead from TV news reports based on a UCL press release rather than from the police in person.

"The police have not identified my wife. What the heck is going on? The BBC and Sky News are saying that Gladys is dead but no one has told me that. It's not what the police told me, they have not identified her. I have been sitting down here and nobody is telling me anything. If they have got some information that is of benefit to me, why don't they pass it on to me? We are in pieces here. We are still waiting for news of Gladys. People are going on air and telling the whole world that she is dead and she hasn't even been identified." Emmanuel Wundowa, quoted in The Guardian July 12th
But there are more significant ways in which the treatment of Gladys Wundowa’s death leaves me feeling uncomfortable. The University after all took more interest in her after her death than they ever had (or would have done) when she lived. Would there have been a press release if she had succeeded in her ambition of escaping from her work as a cleaner and going to work at a housing association? Surely ‘London’s Global University’ ought to acknowledge the achievements of a global migrant, who like some of our own students juggles work and education. This was a largely anonymous and poorly paid worker, whose labour the daytime inhabitants of the University would presumably only ever comment on if their bin hadn’t been mysteriously emptied overnight, or if the shit wasn’t cleaned off toilet bowls. The best servants, after all, are the ones who don’t make you aware of their presence. Yet she was appropriated as a sign of our own victim status on July 7th. In death, as in life, her presence was closely linked, even defined by her absence; her corporeality existed largely in the negative for most of UCL. Unlike the Head of Cleaning and Waste Services or myself you can’t find a picture of Gladys Wundowa on UCL’s website, even though she has worked there for much longer than I have. In the theorist Achille Mbembe’s terms this is part of a new necropolitics, a global expression of sovereignty in which the world is divided into those who are disposable and those who are not; those who can be wasted and those who cannot. Like any reserve army of labour, large proportions of the new African diasporas are virtually defined by their disposability if not in terms of death then in terms of employment. Mbembe’s apparently melodramatic description of vast swathes of the world’s population as ‘the living dead’ seems meaningful in this context.

As kindly people in Tanzania enquired after the wellbeing of my own family in London, I too unreflectively started to exploit the memory of Gladys Wundowa (‘she was killed within sight of my office’), by recycling her story as some perverse sort of proof that I was affected by the bombings, that the narrative of the bombing we were watching on BBC World was ‘real’ and had some kind of impact on me, though in actuality (a) I was on the other side of the planet at the time, (b) my wife who works in London had rung me on my mobile within an hour of the explosions to say she was fine and (c) it has had very little effect on daily routine subsequently. As someone said to me when I went to Tavistock Square to reflect on the bombings on my return, the Ashes victory in the cricket has eclipsed the memory of the bomb from popular consciousness. The embodied living Gladys was far less visible to me than her ghostly representation, which like all images is vulnerable to exploitation in the ways it is used, not excluding, of course, the way I am using it now.

On Thursday 14th July the President of Ghana, John Kufuor, visited Emmanuel Wundowa and his two children at his home in Romford in order to express his condolences. The President was on his way home to Ghana via London after an official visit to Jamaica. The Ghanaian High Commissioner, Isaac Osei, presented Mr Wundowa with a quantity of drinks and cash on behalf of the President, the Government and people of Ghana. Mr. Wundowa announced that when the UK authorities conclude their investigations and released the body of Gladys to him, he would use the money to send her home to Ghana for burial (Accra Daily Mail, 26th July). He emphasized that the visit of the President and
Ministers was characterized by purely Ghanaians funeral tradition and said “I am proud to be a Ghanaian and I am also proud of you as my President.”

Gladys Wundowa’s corpse was returned to her family around the 19th July after the coroner’s inquest and a memorial service was held in Westminster Central Hall on the 13th August led by the Minister from their Baptist church in Hackney. In a bizarre piece of opportunism the Ghanaian High Commissioner used the service to remind the largely Ghanaian congregation ‘to be law abiding sojourners and to alert the High Commission of the misconduct of others who infringe on laws and regulations regarding their stay in the United Kingdom and which could put the name of Ghana in disrepute.’ On August 17th her remains were flown to Accra. It was almost exactly a year since her previous visit to the country. The body was conveyed to Avenui-Awudome in the Volta Region, (which was Gladys’s hometown) for burial and funeral rites on the 20th of August. After another memorial service the family continued to Nalerigu in the Northern region, where her husband’s family live) for the last ceremony. Mr Wundowa was at pains to point out the support he had had from the funeral committee and from the Ghanaian community in London and from the Ghanaian government.

It is interesting when chasing down the electronic paperchase of Gladys Wundowa that the vast majority of biographies in the press use the same limited material and emphasize her work as a cleaner. Only really the Ghanaian press and websites (Ghanaweb.com) serving the diaspora follow the story on to describe the President’s visit, the memorial service and the repatriation of the corpse. They make no mention of her job as a cleaner and instead describe her as ‘an administrative secretary working with a charity, the African Development Agency in Hackney’ or more vaguely as ‘a social worker.’ Perhaps this rapid tailing off of reporting is British reserve, a reflection of a culture that regards the burial arrangements of a victim as a private matter and press attention at such times as a prurient invasion of a family’s privacy. But perhaps it also reflects the fact that the Wundowa family’s words and actions test the limits of the claim frequently made after the London bombing that the ethnic diversity of the victims was proof of London’s cosmopolitanism and successful race relations. The Wundoas asserted their Ghanaian loyalties in a way which sat awkwardly with such claims. The British and American press were equally vague about Mrs Wundowa’s legal status in the UK. She was described variously as ‘a British citizen, ‘Ghanaian born’ ‘a long-term resident in London’ and as ‘a native of Ghana.’ For many the ‘home’ she left at 4am on July 7th was clearly just somewhere she resided.

Any study of any ‘diaspora’ soon tends to address the very particular practicalities and significance of death. Of course death is the single most important shared universal human experience, but the geographical character of loss is foregrounded in the context of those who die separated from their kin and, if they have one, their homeland. Even so diasporas and Africans do not have a monopoly on this circumstance. The practicalities of mass casualties in the European wars of the first half of the 20th century meant that we took ‘a part of England’ to France, whilst today no image of the war in Iraq has more traction on public opinion in the UK and the US than the spectre of body-bags being unloaded in an airforce base ‘back home’. Both strategies are attempts to re-unite place
and person after death. So, whilst narratives around moving corpses are varied, the claim here is that they take on a particular saliency in the context of a diaspora.

No event is more likely to ensure solidarity within any diasporic network than an untimely death of a young brother or sister. In the case of Gladys Wundowa there were many relationships and achievements to remember and recount—her personal educational achievements, her extensive voluntary work with new arrivals from Ghana, her churchlife, her family. However in other cases, where someone has come to the UK to study or work for example, and has yet to assemble such productive networks and repay the hopes of friends and family, the story is more tragic. It is a tragedy in the literary sense, insofar as the outcome is predictable from the beginning. It is statistically likely that the ambitions of those individuals who move to Britain will be unfulfilled and will, at the least, have to be rearranged—architects become security guards. Where such personal biographies end in the added horror of early death they not only take on the particular poignancy of crushed ambitions but also reflect the solipsism of the self-interested human subjects who are watching: the insistent anxiety of our own fates. Spectators are reminded of the false sense of invulnerability associated with ‘youth’. Such deaths are mourned and demand action.

In the context of African diaspora’s such deaths make a very particular impact. First, the expectations placed on international migrants by their families are especially great (Nymanjoh, 2005 *Citizenship Studies* paper). The capital involved in the wager of sending a child overseas is often mobilised across a wide kin network, and may involve mortgaging land or property. Such pressures explain part of the leverage that disconnected families at home still have over migrants in Europe. Second, the politics of place, belonging and indigeneity are particularly prominent in much of the African continent at the current time. The tense relationship between the state and sub-national scales as each competes to be the locus of primary patriotism has meant that burial can become a very practical demonstration of loyalty to place. In one famous Cameroonian case, an individual was standing for parliament, but there was some question over his right to represent a particular area because he had not been born there (because his parents had migrated in search of work) and as such though he claimed to share the ethnic affiliation of those voters there was some doubt over whether he really belonged. To demonstrate his loyalty to his intended constituency he had the graves of his parents reopened and the corpses relocated halfway across the country from the town where they had lived and worked all their lives and been buried, back to the village from which he claimed descent and where he wanted to be MP. This macabre story is important because it demonstrates that the significance placed on burial in the family compound is not a relict of tradition, but a contemporary and new response to changing political circumstances. The new politics of belonging has elevated the significance of burial.

Just before beginning the fieldwork in Cameroon for this research project a young Cameroonian woman studying in Cardiff died from HIV-AIDS, and within a few days a series of fundraising meetings had been held in London and in Wales to help cover the costs of repatriating the corpse. The meetings were organised primarily (but not exclusively) around her ethnic affiliation, and brought together both those who knew her
and those who did not. An existing relatively formal association representing her hometown (not far from one of our case studies) mobilised a wider and looser meeting on an ad hoc basis to come together and solve this particular problem. They came together both to mourn and to assist financially. Those who could not travel to the meetings sent financial contributions. The meetings raised just over £3,000 from a network numbered only in tens of donors. This was sufficient to deal with the wake, the bureaucracy of death in the UK and to repatriate the corpse to Douala at which point national scale associations were waiting to continue to process of returning the corpse to the village for burial in the family compound.

In this case the political implications are almost certainly irrelevant, and furthermore it is important for those with an interest in place not to overstate its significance. In this case the given motive for contributing is also about family. Whilst self-interest amongst the diaspora means that such donations can (and openly are) couched in terms of anticipating future reciprocity if disaster strikes the family of the donor, there is a very visceral emotion that underpins this assistance. The horror expressed to me at the idea that this young woman would be buried in the UK speaks volumes about the sense of alienation from Britain amongst the Cameroonian diaspora. It is far more comfortable, however, to anthropologise this return of bodies by picking up the talk of ancestors and the hometown burial. But the overwhelming explanation offered for why it was so important to repatriate the corpse of this young woman, despite the cost was the need to return the body to the mother who had nurtured baby and child and not to the motherland. The ‘patria’ in repatriation may be contested along a variety of interesting axes (gender, state vs. local community, migrants vs those in the village) but place was not as important as family in understanding the imperative to send corpses home.

The particular importance of the repatriation and the character of burial in contemporary ‘African’ practice is not something to be essentialized. One of the findings of this project has been it is vital to understand the history of urban burial associations. In Tanzania at least we have some archival evidence of the way in which such associations were instrumentalized for the convenience of the colonial state. Both the ideology that Africans did not belong in the city and the ideology that Africans could only be understood within a framework of tribes sat comfortably with the emergence of urban burial associations in the early 20th century, which if not supported by the colonial state were not discouraged either. Equally the post-colonial history of moving corpses reflects changing narratives of nation-building within and between the case study countries. The post 1984 politics of belonging and the collapse of the nation-building project in Cameroon is marked by an upsurge in moving corpses back to the village for burial. This is not to say that repatriation, burial and burial associations are a European invention or that burial was not important in the pre-colonial period, but it is to suggest that the importance of burial and the details of the ritual are subject to continuous change over time and need to be understood in political context.

National and trans-national associations, such as those which repatriated the corpse of the student from Cardiff to Cameroon and the one that Gladys worked for as a volunteer in East London helping new Ghanaian immigrants find their feet, were the starting point and
are the subject of this research. In particular the project is concerned with the relationship between these associations and development in the African hometown or other places with which they are associated. To what extent and in what ways do domestic and international migrants steer, fund and speak about development at home? How do migrants organise themselves into associations for development purposes? What capacities do these associations have? What developmental work do these associations do? What other work do these associations do whether intentionally or unintentionally and overtly or covertly?

However, over the course of the research so far these questions have morphed somewhat into a more triangular relationship in which development and diaspora cannot be separated from questions of identity, citizenship and modernity. Avowedly developmental projects in African hometowns are inseparable from other labels of change. Indeed development projects are the means by which these other changes are accelerated, they provide the superficial justification beneath which other, more socially controversial, changes can take place without being challenged. For example, in relation to identity, the changing affiliation to kin and family and the changing obligations an individual has to their kin and family in the village are being driven by the interests of those outside the village and are being expressed through debates about remittances, schools, hospitals and mortuaries.

When we began enquiring about the developmental impact of diasporic associations we did not expect to encounter death so immediately or that conversations about death would be woven through our research in so many places or indeed that so many of our interviews would be conducted during death celebrations. Through the developmental aspects of death (the construction of mortuaries in hometowns) questions of modernising burial, or of changing the solidarity which holds burial associations together emerge. Death is only one of a number of empirical entry points that we are using to explore these cross-cutting themes. Other entry points include homes, education, water and health. In each case our aim is to look at the ways in which the practicalities of being in the diaspora and the desire to develop the hometown reveal other, simultaneous changes in and differences between the case studies.

It was the ubiquitous significance of death in all four case studies that led me towards Achille Mbembe’s work on necropolitics. But my immediate response to that work is that his righteous and justified fury against what Derek Gregory (referring explicitly to Mbembe) called the ‘indifferent calculations of geopolitics’ in the colonial present, itself allows that same geopolitics to enframe the debate. Necropolitics is an unrelentingly global politics concerned with big concepts (sovereignty, citizenship) and big events (war, genocide). The necropolitics we have encountered in Cameroon and Tanzania operates at a different scale, it permeates through, rather than tramples over the lives, associations and places we are seeking to understand. There is in other words a quotidian necropolitics, a personal necropolitics. The two are not necessarily opposed, rather they are necessary corollaries of each other. By remembering Gladys Wundowa, I aimed to link our work both to global narratives of terror and also to what Mbembe calls the ‘living dead’ status of the disposable people of the world – the inhabitants of refugee
camps, reserve armies of labour, third world farmers. My argument is that one way to challenge the depersonalisation of necropolitics as discussed by Mbembe is to draw attention to the personal narratives of the African diaspora.
2: Data Collection

2.1 Cameroon and Tanzania

There were 4 case studies, 2 in Tanzania (Rungwe and Newala) and 2 in Cameroon (Bali and Mamfe).

National Comparison:

Similarities:
- Colonial History (German + British)
- Post-colonial political stability, hegemonic ruling party
- No substantial refugee communities outside the country
- Simmering secessionist issues, Anglophones and Zanzibar
- Agro-industrial plantations mainstay of colonial economy
- Relatively diverse agricultural sector
- High levels of ethnic diversity, no dominant ethnic groups

Differences:
- Tanzania larger population, but Cameroon less poor by most objective measures
- Tourism and minerals in Tanzania vs oil as the mainstay of the economy in Cameroon
- Tanzania substantive and sustained nation-building project only relatively recently reduced, Cameroon abandoned nation-building in the early 1980s
- Tanzania tribalism is taboo and repressed, Cameroon ‘united only by ethnic competition’ – tribalism is officially disdained but tacitly endorsed.
- Recent Tanzanian government has embraced liberalization and is a darling of the donor community, whereas Cameroon continues to play the politics of non-reform and is widely reviled as corrupt and inept.
- Tanzania very long history of international trade and migration across the Indian ocean, racially cosmopolitan. Cameroon shorter history of involvement in international trade and looks West to Europe, the West Indies and the USA

2.2 Research methods & summary of data gathered

a) Interviews

- In the hometown with hometown association officials, government officials, local community leaders and retired migrants and local residents
- In the main cities with hometown association officials, elite and non-elite members of the ‘diaspora’

In total 266 interviews written up/transcribed so far
b) Questionnaire
- Demographics
- Livelihoods and income
- Travel experience and mobility
- Remittances sent and received
- Hometown association membership and attitudes
- Opinions on development in the hometown

c) Archives
- Cameroon National Archives in Buea and Bamenda (late colonial and early post-colonial government correspondence, newspapers)
- Tanzania National Archives, Dar es Salaam (late colonial and early post-colonial government correspondence)
- East Africana Section, University of Dar es Salaam, (newspapers, post-colonial theses, Tanganyika Notes and Queries)
- Tanzania Government, Home Office, Registrar of Societies’ Archive (files on registered societies)

d) Diasporic e-mail lists

2.3 Social survey

More detailed comments on the methods used in the social survey.

Around 10 local university students were trained as questionnaire enumerators in Cameroon and in Tanzania. The questionnaires were administered on a face-to-face basis by the enumerators in English or pidgin English in Cameroon and in Kiswahili in Tanzania. The respondents’ answers were written down by the enumerators in English. Translating the questionnaire into pidgin or Kiswahili was an integral part of the enumerator training and was vital to the enumerators gaining an understanding of the meaning of individual questions and the aim of the overall project. Enumerators were initially observed in the field to ensure good practice. Each individual questionnaire took around 30 minutes to complete properly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Total number of responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamfe</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungwe</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newala</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of the survey

Around 2,200 questionnaires were completed. For each case study about 50% of the questionnaires were collected in the hometown itself and around 50% outside the hometown. The hometown itself was taken to be a Sub-division in Cameroon (Bali & Mamfe Central) and a District in Tanzania (Rungwe and Newala). Though the Tanzanian areas were larger, these are reasonably comparable scales of political space within the Government hierarchy. They each comprise a rural town and the surrounding villages.
The sample was split approximately 50/50 between the rural town and surrounding villages. Survey villages were selected to capture some of the physical and ethnic differences within the Sub-division/District. In the hometowns it was possible to collect a stratified random sample, by selecting streets at random and then sampling every third house. A conscious attempt was made to get a broadly equal division of men and women and a diverse age range.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Tally of women</th>
<th>%Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamfe</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungwe</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newala</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2274</td>
<td>1004</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender balance across the sample

Of those 50% of the questionnaires completed outside the hometown, some were collected from those with an affiliation to the hometown or district in intermediate or secondary cities and some from those in the largest urban centres. So there is scope for comparison not only between urban and rural attitudes, but between those in primary and secondary cities too.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident in hometown</td>
<td>1262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not resident in hometown</td>
<td>1012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection of Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hometowns</td>
<td>1262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Cities</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Cities</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the samples collected away from the hometown it was harder to get a truly random sample. The enumerators were searching from people who were ‘from’ the relevant place. They searched by place rather than by ethnic affiliation in order to try and find diasporic representatives of minority ethnic groups in addition to dominant ethnic groups. Having initially identified an individual household from the case study in the city enumerators used the respondent’s advice to search for the next household. By starting different pairs of enumerators in different parts of the city a diverse sample was collected despite the use of a snowball method, what Richard Black at IDS refers to as ‘snowballing with multiple entry points’. This was more important in the cities of Tanzania where there is much lower ethnic social segregation than in Cameroon. In Cameroonian cities certain parts of the city had particularly high concentrations of people from Bali and Mamfe. These families covered a diverse range of incomes, with all but the
highest tier represented. This enabled a higher level of randomness in selecting respondents because enumerators were directed from one to another on the basis of proximity rather than because the next link was someone well-known to the previous link.

The data presented in the next section are mostly drawn from this survey.

3. The case studies and their associated hometown associations

The four case studies used in the project all comprise a town and its surrounding villages. In Cameroon they are ‘sub-divisions’ and in Tanzania they are ‘districts’. In each case they were selected because we were aware that there was an active hometown association who were involved in development projects. These associations, some of which have histories going back to the 1940s and origins even before that, are clubs which those who leave the hometown join seeking support from each other and socialising together. In recent years they have become high profile participants in development in the hometown as well as providing welfare to communities living away from their hometown. In some cases these development activities date back to the 50s and 60s but in general this is a recent initiative. In this quick summary the aim is to highlight some of the differences between these places, which explain why they were selected, and to describe the structure and work of the hometown association in each place.

3.1 Bali and BANDECA

The first case study was Bali-Nyonga in the North-west Province of Cameroon. Bali is both a town and a sub-division. Though it is dominated by the Bali-Nyonga ethnic group there are also some minority groups within the sub-division. Bali is not a particularly wealthy area in terms of agricultural produce, though there is a long history of coffee production and co-ops. It is an upland area and relatively high, with grass covered hills surrounding the town, which is more low-lying. Bali has however achieved a notoriety that its size does not reflect. This is partly because it was from a very early stage a centre of education. Bali formed an early alliance with German colonists in 1891 and were given suzerainty over their neighbours. As a result they allowed the Basel Mission to form a base, whose school was (and is) of national repute. Through the alliance with the Germans the Bali were also deeply involved in the supply of plantation labour from an early stage. In part this was a case of Bali-Nyonga men themselves and in part the coerced recruitment of their neighbours. The limited space and opportunity at home in addition to the long history of labour migration and education means that the Bali people have been very mobile.

The second aspect for which Bali is well known is its highly authoritarian and hierarchical social structure and its conflictual history with its neighbours. Bali is one of a number of such highly centralised polities or chieftaincies in the region, whose leader known as a Fon. The Fon of Bali remains a key figure in the life of the hometown and its diaspora. The Palace and its ancilliary buildings compete with the structures of the central and local government as the focus of town life. Even those who are critical of the current
individual who is Fon still claim to respect the position he holds. The Bali have always had relatively conflictual relations with their neighbours. In part this is because of colonial history and in part because of the pre-colonial narrative (which is actively preserved and circulated) which emphasizes the fact that the Bali only arrived in this place relatively recently and took the land by conquest.

The study focused on the Bali-Nyonga Cultural and Development Association, known as BANDECA. This hometown association has members in the town itself and has chapters in most of the main towns in Cameroon. The bulk of the leaders come either from the capital Yaounde or from the coastal plantations in Fako. It has an ancillary women’s association called Nku’umu Fed Fed and also has close links with a very large Bali association in the USA\(^1\). It has links with European groups in the UK, France, Switzerland and Germany – but these are much less well developed. BANDECA, which was formally constituted in 1999, is only the latest manifestation of this organisation, which has ebbed and flowed for some decades. Their have been times when rival organisations, splinter groups and sub-town scale associations have operated concurrently and times when no group has operated at all.

Like most such groups BANDECA has a long and detailed constitution from which I have abstracted part of the preamble and the objectives:

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“We, the people of Bali Nyonga origin,
Conscious of our Cultural heritage and desirous to preserve and foster same,
Aware of the need for development as directed by the Government of our Country and desirous to assist in this development process in so far as Bali Nyonga is concerned,
Desirous to foster peace and harmonious living amongst ourselves and to cater for the social well-being of all Bali Nyonga sons and daughters.

Do hereby constitute this Association and solemnly ordain and establish this statute hereinafter called "Constitution of the Bali Nyonga Development and Cultural Association" (abbreviated as BANDECA) to guide and direct the conduct of affairs of the Association .”

'ARTICLE 4: OBJECTIVES

The Association shall be a non-political organisation with the following objectives:

[a] The study, preservation and promotion of the cultural and historical heritage of Bali Nyonga. The cultural aims of BANDECA shall be achieved through the publication of News Letters and Scholarly Works, the organisation of Workshops and other legitimate methods deemed necessary.

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\(^{1}\) The USA branch represents not just Bali-Nyonga, but several other Bali settlements elsewhere in Cameroon too. None of these is as large or significant as Bali-Nyonga.
[b] The development of Bali Nyonga in areas and aspects where local initiative can complement government action in overall national development.

[c] To work for peace, unity and progress and to foster these in Bali Nyonga and elsewhere.

[d] To contribute on a philanthropic basis to the educational and cultural advancement of the Bali Nyonga people.

[e] To support and co-operate with any legally constituted organization that shares similar objectives.

[f] To support and co-operate with national institutions towards the achievement of the above aims and objectives.'

Since its formation BANDECA has been involved in the restoration of parts of the Fon’s palace, the rehabilitation of the District Officer’s office, the construction of a mortuary, the construction of public toilets, and the construction of a new town water supply. The largest of these projects was the water supply which cost approaching £100,000 of which £22,000 was raised in cash from the members of the association in a period of around 3 months. The USA group of Bali diaspora have supplied equipment for the maternity ward at the Bali hospital and other technical equipment for the hospital as well as paying for Bali-born medical doctors living and working in the USA to come back to Cameroon and run a week of free clinics for local people.

3.2 Mamfe and MECA

The second case study is in Mamfe Central sub-division in Manyu in the South West province of Cameroon. This area also comprises both a town and a surrounding rural hinterland. Unlike Bali it is very low lying, down in the Cross river basin, a humid forest zone. Potentially very productive for palm oil, cocoa and fruit, Mamfe’s economic growth has been stunted by its very poor transport connections, it is largely cut off from much of the rest of the Cameroonian network. Whilst the roads in town have now been tarred, those connecting Mamfe to other urban centres are not. Such growth as there has been relies on cross-border trade with Nigeria.

Unlike Bali, Mamfe is categorised by anthropologists as a microcephelous (ie village level chiefs), flat, egalitarian society, without a paramount chief. Mamfe central subdivision is not dominated by a single ethnic group, the Bayangi, Ejagham and Anyang are the three largest and village level leaders and councils are far more important. A degree of unity between the different Mamfe people is, however, achieved by a shared membership of a male initiation society – Ekpe. The secret societies, dances and libations associated with Ekpe are the crucial means by which the external elites of Mamfe have
built a shared identity that enables them to act at a higher scale than the village level when operating in Cameroon’s ethnic geopolitics.

Also unlike Bali, Mamfe has a long history of supporting the government and opposition political parties have never been powerful in the area. There is in return always a ‘Manyu Minister’ currently the Minister of Forests and Wildlife. Despite this loyalty the main obstacles to prosperity in Mamfe, the roads to Kumba and Bali, have been kept in a bad state since independence for internal political regions. This road is entirely within Anglophone Cameroon and used to provide the main north-south route between the north-west and south-west provinces. Keeping this road in a poor state prevents any development of internal Anglophone trade.

The hometown association in Mamfe has a more complex structure than that of Bali. Despite Ekpe, it only really makes sense to talk of a ‘united’ Manyu identity for those who have left the region and who are members either of the national or international diaspora. MECA – the Manyu Elements Cultural Association is not a single co-ordinated network. Rather each MECA (MECA Yaounde, MECA Douala, MECA USA) is actually autonomous and has its own constitution. For a development project a particular MECA acts bilaterally with, for example the hospital to deliver the project. MECA’s USA branch have constructed a mortuary for example – though it is not yet complete and has been built within sight of the existing government mortuary and have contributed both to the hospital and the new Catholic cathedral. The attempt to form an overarching ‘General MECA’ has conspicuously failed, although MECA Yaoundé does act to some extent as an National Executive and different MECAs do also cooperate on some projects, notably the mortuary. MECA has no grassroots (or indeed any) structure in the home area but in the cities it relies heavily on the (grassroots) family groups, that meet regularly for saving money and mutual support in the city. These groups are family or clan based and operate at a village level, reflecting the primary patriotism to the village rather than the division. MECA then appropriates their membership rolls as its own membership. These family groups in the cities often have their own village level development projects, such as town halls, in addition to supporting MECA’s projects.

It is not possible to find MECA in the hometown, but it is in Yaounde, for example, where they have constructed a hall to be used by the Mamfe community for fundraising meetings, weddings and other occasions. In Mamfe itself it is only possible to find village level hometown associations. These can work on small-scale projects like village halls and some water supplies. Because of competition between villages and ethnic groups within Mamfe if MECA wants to support development in the area it has to invest in Mamfe Town where facilities will benefit all the different groups within the sub-division. MECA also distributes medicines to health districts across the Division of Manyu. There is also an American MECA splinter group, NOMA who dissatisfied with the MECA leadership have formed their own institution and have constructed an internet café in Mamfe, and sent books for an as yet unopened library.

3.3 Rungwe and RuDET, SeDeFo and RuEDeFo
The third case study was Rungwe District, which comprises Tukuyu town and a large rural hinterland in Mbeya Region. Rungwe is a mountainous district in the south-west of Tanzania on the border with Malawi. It covers an extraordinary range of altitude and produces a correspondingly diverse range of crops from Irish potatoes, through tea, coffee, bananas and cocoa to rice. For much of the district this agriculture has provided a reliable income, and tea (which is grown as a smallholder crop) is doing particularly well at the moment. Different parts of the district have prospered at different times. Like most of mainland Tanzania, Rungwe has always been supportive of the ruling CCM party – indeed in one of the two constituencies the opposition parties do not even contest the seat.

Historically, like Bali it was a leader in the field of education (the cool climate suited the German missionaries) again a consequence of the missions – a mixture of Moravians, Lutherans and Catholics. At independence this educational advantage meant that along with the Chagga and the Haya, from the North and West of the country, Nyakyusa people from Rungwe were well positioned to access government jobs. In his comments on tribalism Nyerere usually singled the three groups out. Subsequently, however, there is a general sentiment of having fallen behind, particularly in education. Whilst the road to Malawi passes through Rungwe, much of the east of the district has poor access and fewer services.

In terms of its ethnic character Rungwe shares some features with Bali. It is dominated by the Nyakyusa, but with minority groups also present. However, chieftaincy having been abolished in Tanzania in the early years of independence when indirect rule was overturned, it has little contemporary visible presence. However, our interviews revealed that many key figures in Rungwe turn out to be from chiefly lines. Partly this is because they had educational advantages dating back to the colonial period, that mean they are better positioned in the present and partly because they have a residual authority in rural areas. However, our attempt to choose a centralised hierarchical society, which could be compared with Bali in Cameroon, was not entirely successful. The Nyakyusa was a classic case of a tribal identity largely invented by the British colonial system in order to subsequently establish indirect rule. The archival accounts of this process and the selection of chiefs comes through very clearly from the annual district books. So while there were pre-colonial chiefs there was never a paramount Nyakyusa chief and chiefly authority was small scale and strictly limited.

Unlike Bali, Mamfe and Newala where the early migrations were all driven by the demands for labour on coastal plantations, the first significant labour migrations from Rungwe were to the Lupa goldfields around 50kms to the northwest near Lake Rukwa. Work in the goldfields began in the 20s and continued until the 50s. Lupa was near enough to Rungwe to enable miners to return home for part of the year. After the second world war, however, when the work in Lupa was declining the Nyakyusa joined the flows of migration to the sisal plantations of Tanga and to the city of Dar es Salaam. It was in the late 40s and early 50s that the first evidence of Nyakyusa hometown associations emerges.
The contemporary hometown associations in Rungwe date from the 1980s. Since such associations were considered ‘tribalistic’ in post independence Tanzania they were discouraged. Only more recently – since the 1990s have they expanded significantly and this expansion has been through government channels and within government structures – primarily local councils. In Rungwe the hometown associations are concerned almost entirely with education, though they also have been active in cultural education programmes – for example campaigns against witchcraft. Unlike Bali there are a diverse range of associations in Rungwe, in particular we looked at the Rungwe District Education Trust, Rungwe East Development Foundation and the Selya Development Foundation. Only the first has a mandate over the whole district, the other two are concerned with education in increasingly small areas. In general their role is to transfer relatively small sums of money, via the local MP from the urban elite as encouragement to the people in the village. The money is usually in the form of building materials and the local communities add their own money and labour to then provide school buildings. Once established these schools are supported by the government who send teachers. Relative to Cameroon the scale of these contributions is small and the hometown associations are less well known. The bulk of Rudet’s income for example comes not from urban migrants, but from a crop cess on local tea producers.

3.4 Newala district and the NDF

The final case study is in Newala – a district on the Makonde plateau above the Ruvuma river that separates Tanzania from Mozambique. Of the four studies this is the least prosperous with very limited agricultural opportunities for small holders. The only cash crop of any significance is cashew nuts, and the cashew processing plant in Newala is redundant which means that farmers need to move their crops over a 6 hour journey to Mtwara. Most producers sell to travelling buyers, who act as a cartel setting the price and disadvantaging the growers. Opportunities for expanding agriculture in the future are chronically limited by the shortage of reliable water supplies. The 50 year old colonial water supply which lifted water from sources at the bottom of the plateau is now insufficient and more recent expansions inadequate. Like Mamfe district, Newala district is enclaved, with poor quality, poorly integrated transport links to Mtwara or Lindi and on to Dar. Like Mamfe it is also a border point, though because of the civil war in Mozambique it is only recently that this crossing has opened up significant opportunities for trade.

Newala is similar to Mamfe in terms of social hierarchy, it is an acephelous, flat, egalitarian society – with no chiefs at all. Furthermore Newala district, though dominated by the Makonde, is also home to a sizeable minority of Makua and Yao people, who occupied parts of the area by force in the 19th century. Classically British colonial officials favoured the Yao, who they saw as warriors and there is some residual tension, and distinct segregation between the Yao on the one hand and the Makua and Makonde on the other. The Makonde are well known both nationally and internationally as carvers and a significant number of Makonde migrants left the plateau to work as craftsmen in Mtwara and in Dar. However, in terms of numbers post-war migration to the sisal plantations in Tanga was more significant, even if it was less well-known.
The hometown development association in Newala is the NDF – the Newala Development Foundation. This is much more of a hometown association in the classic West African model than Rudet in Rungwe. First, it was the brainchild of the external migrants in Dar es Salaam, who provide a significant proportion of the money and ideas for the development projects at home. Most funding for the NDF still comes from the crop cess though, to the extent that the home branch has actually subsidised the Dar branch at times in the past! Second, it is a unitary organisation which brings different interests together into a single organisation. Like the Rungwe associations however their main developmental interest is with secondary education. They were responsible for constructing the first seven secondary schools in the district and, while six of these have since passed to state control, they still run one (Kitangari) as a private school, although their intention is to hand this over once they have established a sixth form there. They have also provided some desks and educational materials to other schools in the district.

3.5

Cross case study comparisons

Four studies were chosen because they all had active hometown associations and diasporas. Also because they were comparable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bali</th>
<th>Small, strongly centralised polity, with paramount chief</th>
<th>Ethnically largely homogenous</th>
<th>Well connected, fairly well developed in terms of public services</th>
<th>Educational advantage from colonial period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mamfe</td>
<td>Egalitarian, microcephelous, decentralised to village level, male initiation main basis of unity</td>
<td>Ethnically heterogeneous</td>
<td>Enclaved, reasonable public services in town centre, but lacking basic infrastructure (roads)</td>
<td>Limited educational opportunities in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungwe</td>
<td>Large group of polities. Hierarchical with a history of chieftaincy, but</td>
<td>Ethnically largely homogenous</td>
<td>Well connected in Western part of the district with reasonable public services. Eastern</td>
<td>Educational advantage from colonial period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
despite colonial attempts never strongly centralised under a paramount
central part of the district
poor access and relatively poor services

| Newala | Egalitarian, acephalous, no significant tradition of chieftaincy | Ethnically fairly heterogeneous | Enclaved, very limited public services lacking basic infrastructure (water and roads) | Limited educational opportunities in the past |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Very Low (&lt;£10/month)</th>
<th>% Low (£10-50/month)</th>
<th>% Medium (£50-200)</th>
<th>% High (£200+)</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamfe</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungwe</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newala</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Income, percentage in each category in each case study after removing voids.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural town (hometown)</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediary town</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major city</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Income, percentage in each category for each type of town after removing voids.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Other groups within the District or Sub-division</th>
<th>Other groups from outside district or sub-division</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manyu</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungwe</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newala</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages of ethnic affiliations within samples by case study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Survey site</th>
<th>% who have lived away from the hometown (studying or working)</th>
<th>% who have lived overseas (working or studying)</th>
<th>% who have lived or worked outside Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>Bali (301)</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fako (96)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Mobility Away</td>
<td>Living Outside the Home</td>
<td>Living Outside Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douala (97)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaounde (60)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamfe Mamfe (311)</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fako (85)</td>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douala (94)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaounde (62)</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungwe Rungwe (325)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbeya (110)</td>
<td></td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dar es Salaam (142)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newala Newala (323)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mtwara (118)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dar es Salaam (146)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mobility. Percentage of the sample from different survey sites with experience of living away from the hometown, outside the home nation and outside Africa.
4. Beginning at the end: the BANDECA mortuary in Bali

I want now to draw on some of our more qualitative work in order to show how looking at death, development and the diaspora opens up other stories and changes in one particular case study: the mortuary in Bali.

Our very first research site was in Bali-Nyonga in north-west Cameroon. On a preliminary visit to discuss the project and inform the forces of law and order of our plans, we asked whether we could see any of the development work carried out by the local hometown association. We were escorted through town to the government hospital to see the new mortuary. The plaque on the side of the mortuary reads:

[Insert picture of plaque here]

[Insert picture of mortuary here]

The external building had been constructed along with the rest of the hospital buildings by the Cameroonian Government some years earlier. The conversion from an empty shell into a functioning mortuary however had been paid for by the object of our research – The Bali-Nyonga Development and Cultural Association. Even though Bali is a small town, which really has the feel of a large village, the Bali mortuary is one of the largest and most self-consciously modern in Cameroon. The mortuary has the capacity to hold 12 corpses for an indefinite period. It has back-up generators to accommodate the unreliability of the electricity supply and an adjacent covered waiting room where mourners can gather when the corpse is being removed and shelter from either rain or sun. There are two classes of chamber in the mortuary, the standard class, which accounts for most of the spaces and a superior class, which occupies the higher tier within the building and which entitles the family to certain rights such as keeping the key to the chamber, thereby enabling them to inspect and remove the corpse at times of their own choosing.

The mortuary is one of BANDECA’s most significant infrastructure projects to date. It cost them 19,492,491 CFA (just over £20,000), which was raised largely from members’ donations. The President of the Association, Nyamdi Ndifontah (who is the boss at the Palais de Congres in Yaounde with the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary) personally donated around 1 million CFA. The mortuary project was something of a ‘loss-leader’ for the current BANDECA committee, who wanted a relatively small and achievable project like this to demonstrate their seriousness. Others within the membership were more sceptical – the phrase ‘we should be concerned with the living not the dead’ was given to us from several sources. In retrospect, however, now that the mortuary is working there is general unanimity that it was a worthwhile development project in Bali. The leaders of BANDECA claim that it is a project which meets both their developmental and cultural objectives. In terms of development the leaders of BANDECA treat the mortuary in terms of economics and local services. Prior to construction families in this area who wanted to put a corpse into a mortuary had to take it to the government mortuary at the hospital in Bamenda 20kms away. This was often already full, in which
case they had to take the corpse to Baffoussam 80kms away whilst anecdotes circulated of moving corpses even further away from home in Bali to Nkongsamba and Douala towards the coast from where they would have to be brought back to Bali for final burial. The construction of the mortuary was development because it provided local people with a convenient service and saved them money.

There is a particular shortage of mortuary space in north-west Cameroon as a result of the way in which individuals respond to HIV-AIDS infection. The virus is generally contracted on the coast in the plantations, or Douala or in Yaounde by young migrants. In such circumstances many individuals choose to return to the North-west for treatment or palliative care, which is usually provided through family support. Within the last couple of years both the cost and availability of anti-retrovirals has declined markedly, but even so mortality remains high relative to mortuary space. The result is that the Bali-Nyonga mortuary represents an important social service for those who live near Bali because it saves them the cost and inconvenience of moving corpses around the region. In addition the mortuary has proven to be a lucrative commercial asset for BANDECA. Since opening it has produced an income of around 5 million CFAF/annum ($US 10,000), much of which is profit that BANDECA uses elsewhere in the town outside the hospital on their other projects and running costs. Historically the Bali-Nyonga have had a very conflictual relationship with their immediate neighbours, but this has not stopped them selling mortuary space to those from Widikum or elsewhere.

This profit has brought the committee of BANDECA into conflict with the hospital staff and the Government administration. Whilst BANDECA claim to own the mortuary on the grounds that they paid for the equipment using money they raised, the hospital administration disputes this, arguing that BANDECA ‘met’ the building already there and merely equipped it. The Governor of the North-West Province also disputes BANDECA’s right to own the mortuary arguing that whilst the Government is grateful for the contribution made by BANDECA and is happy to work with them in partnership it is not possible for them to claim ownership of a public service within a public institution. Clearly the profitability and popularity of this facility are part of this conflict, but it also illustrates the tension between such associations and the state. However both the parties that are in dispute are part of the same elite government circles, which mean that a compromise is likely to emerge from their rather opaque discussions on the issue. It would be very difficult for the BANDECA leadership to formally hand over ownership because even though they tend to be supporters of the ruling Government party it would be a very unpopular move within the town where a majority of the public are opponents of the Government and supporters of the opposition party. Equally the Governor, as the President’s representative cannot brook the implications of impotence or the long-term complications that flow from the ambiguities of the current situation. Both sides suggested to us that some kind of profit-sharing arrangement between BANDECA and the hospital was one option.

There is an irony here because many of the people who would like to use the Bali mortuary like it precisely because it does not belong to the state. The parochial nationalism – the primary patriotism of many is to Bali and not to Cameroon. It was
common for interviewees to talk of Bali as a country, and even a nation. The Fon of Bali
does not like the territory to be referred to as a chiefdom, but as a kingdom. As such to
use their ‘own’ mortuary is a patriotic act in Bali. In order to paper over these political
tensions within the elite and between the elite and local residents a developmental
language is employed. The construction of the mortuary is described as ‘development’ in
Bali because it improves the amenities of the town and makes money. And as we were
frequently told by people from a variety of political positions: ‘development has no
political colour.’ If a project can be understood as developmental then individual
differences are put to one side and political antagonisms can be conveniently submerged.

However the mortuary also articulates with a process that BANDECA leaders talk about
in terms of cultural change. Historically corpses could be preserved for three or four days
after death and before burial using technologies that were (and are) used across the
region. This time period was sufficient for the tasks that needed to take place before
burial could go ahead, such as digging the grave, preparing food and wine for the death
celebration and spreading information and gathering the clan together for the burial. But
as more and more people from Bali have moved further and further afield to pursue their
ambitions it has become harder to ensure that this time-period is long enough to get ready
and in particular long enough for those who want to get home. Even though
communications are improved and transport is now much quicker it is still necessary to
allow more time for people to return to the town for the burial. In particular it is a
challenge for those employed overseas to get back to the town from the US or the UK if
they need to. So the mortuary has changed the culture of burial by extending the period
for preparations.

Furthermore as Bali have moved, first down to the coast to work on the plantations and
subsequently to the countries major urban centres it has become necessary to reorganise
the process of burial to accommodate the desire to bring the corpse back from wherever
the death took place to the town for burial. Where possible this has meant bringing the
dying back to the village in the final stages of their life. Where it is clear that death is
inevitable it is easier and cheaper to move the living body to the village to die than to
wait until it has become a corpse. Where it is not possible it is necessary to engage a
vehicle to move the corpse, which is very costly. In either case, and again after burial, the
hometown association will be one of the key sources of capital for members of the
diaspora to pay for the transport of corpses back home and for the associated
celebrations. Whether through savings accounts, loans or gifts it is one of a number of
routes through which a family accumulates the necessary capital to cover their costs. This
was not always the case in the past and for some households is not the case today. On the
plantations in the late 19th century and in the first half of the twentieth century for
example the repatriation of corpses was the exception rather than the rule. Both costs and
technology made it impossible. It was not practically possible to get corpses from the
cost to Bali fast enough. Even today the costs are too high for many urban households,
even with the help of the hometown association. Furthermore not all individuals do want
to be buried in Bali; for those who have not been there for many years it may be an
anathema. However the burial process has for many Bali families become increasingly
attenuated and a network of mortuaries is vital to that process.
These preparations are not merely about the business of circulating information and giving the living time to get back to the village for the ceremony. In addition burials (and even more importantly the subsequent death celebrations) are becoming ever more elaborate and ostentatious occasions. The scale of death celebrations in Cameroon generally is increasing as elite individuals use them to flaunt their own success whilst apparently lauding their parents. Bali is near enough to the main centres of government and business for elites with their own vehicles to return to the village for the weekend to enjoy a good death celebration. It is the very success of these migrants (whether nationally or internationally) which fuels these expanded death celebrations. Burials and death celebrations are one of the main opportunities for conspicuous consumption within the village setting and status in Bali as anywhere else in the world is an immensely powerful lever. However, mobilising the capital needed for these events may take some time particularly if the individual who will bear the brunt of the cost is overseas. If the main sponsor of the occasion is in the US or Europe the corpse may remain in the mortuary unburied for some months to allow them time to negotiate leave from their employer, gather their own immediately accessible resources, borrow money from their friends and associates and return to Cameroon capable of ensuring that the burial is sufficiently impressive. The new technology of preserving the corpse provided by BANDECA and the opportunities provided by employment away from Bali either in Cameroon or overseas are integral to the increasing scale of death celebrations.

There is an antinomy here though because the urban elite who run BANDECA are also explicitly intervening in the cultural life of the Bali community in an attempt to directly regulate practices around burial that they themselves have unwittingly helped produce. On the one hand this is a case of self-consciously changing practices within the village which are described as primitive in the name of an enlightened urban modernity. So the leadership of BANDECA has explicitly advocated a substantial reduction in the duration of the mourning period for widows from one year to one week. During this period widows are expected both to dress and behave in a particularly restricted way. Whilst the self-described ‘modernisers’ may be members of the urban elite, the new regulations are enforced through the structures of the traditional ruler and his council in the village. Equally the BANDECA leadership set out to ban the practice of widows and widowers sleeping with the corpse on the night before the wedding. Again the association lobbied the traditional council as its means to achieve these changes in practice. On the other hand it is a case of self-consciously regulating the economic life of the village. Some individuals within the BANDECA leadership are now arguing that it is necessary to contain the scale of death celebrations. It is a common complaint from the BANDECA leadership that whilst it is hard to raise money from within the diaspora to pay for medical costs of the living it is easy to raise large sums of money to fund a death celebration. The use of large quantities of money to fuel a three day long party is increasingly portrayed as a wasteful indulgence. Again this is presented by the urban elite in terms of the primitive rural residents interested only in consumption and indulgence who fail to appreciate that this is an unproductive use of money. Not only is there a contradiction here because articulating the status of urban elites has been one of the driving forces behind the expansion of burial ceremonies, but also because, though they
cannot admit it without losing status, they would be the primary economic beneficiaries of such a change because they are themselves the main funders of lavish death celebrations.

This trend also affects the death celebrations that take place not in the hometown itself, but in other Cameroonian towns where there are groups of Bali. Within the diaspora itself it has become common practice for several Ndakums to join together and hold multiple death celebrations simultaneously, thereby maximising the scale and drama, but achieving cost benefits because the only have to hire marquees, chairs, crockery and a PA system once. These high profile, semi-public occasions are also key venues for ‘re-tribalising’ the second and third generation ‘Balis’ who were born away from the home and have – in the eyes of the association – ‘lost their culture’ but who do now want to reclaim their ethnic identity. For these individuals there is an awkwardness that comes from their position on the periphery of public occasions. They are unable to join in the dances, or the singing, which is generally in Mungaka and because they are not members of the secret societies they are alienated by the jujus. BANDECA in Limbe has taken active steps to retrain these individuals ‘in their own culture’ by bringing dance groups and musicians from the village and the University to provide, what are in effect evening classes in identity so that they can participate fully in death celebrations. Of course, there is no compulsion, and it is fair to assume that many individuals with the same history do not choose to retrain in Baliness, but the incentive is one of involvement in social events, especially death celebrations. BANDECA’s role in the construction of a mortuary is a symptom of a far wider concern with the cultural practices associated with burial.

The Bali mortuary then, captures a number of the themes that underpin this research project. External members of the Bali community were the driving force behind equipping and funding the new mortuary. BANDECA used its most elite members to raise the funds in order to deliver a project and boost trust in the association and its leadership. The capacities of BANDECA are demonstrated not only because the project was delivered and funded by the association but also because it was through the association that they were able to negotiate the politicised bureaucracy and get permission to do the work. However the mortuary is a symptom of a larger process in which the elite are trying to discipline and modernise death. This extends beyond the movement of corpses to the practices before, during and after burial. Residents of the hometown are characterised as primitive by the diaspora because their customs are considered ‘unhygienic’ (in the case of sleeping with the dead) or desciminatory and illiberal (in the case of restrictions on widows) or economically irrational (in the case of expensive extravagant death celebrations). Nevertheless the persistent desire of the external elite to be buried in their hometown speaks of their ongoing loyalty to their birthplace –their primary patriotism is to Bali.
Conclusions/unanswered questions:

1. You don’t need to cross an international boundary to become a member of the diaspora

Most definitions of diaspora treat it as axiomatic that you can’t be a member of the diaspora until you have left the country of your birth. Our own feeling is that this criteria is overstated. In Cameroon at least, the term ‘country’ could as well be applied to Bali as to Cameroon. This does risk further diluting the term diaspora, a process which James Clifford amongst others has already complained about. But the point here is that the existing understanding, with its Jewish lineage, assumes that the expulsion from the homeland is a major trauma. This catastrophic quality is echoed in the work on new African diasporas with its persistent focus on refugees. Our sense is that many of the contemporary diasporas do not occur from such acute crises but from more the more chronic condition of limited opportunity and persistent poverty. Just as Mbembe’s necropolitics needs to be connected to its more personal and everyday level, so to diaspora studies needs to be linked to sub-national studies of urban-rural relations.

In the Cameroonian case this conclusion points to the particular character of the failed project of nationalism in which people from Bali talk about the town as ‘their country’ and talk about ‘the nation of Bali’, but it also holds true in Tanzania, which has had one of the most apparently successful nation-building projects of post-colonial Africa. But for all the important, accurate and detailed work on the linkages between the urban and the rural in Tanzania, it is the sense of alienation and separation between town and country that justifies the claim that those who leave a rural area and build lives in the city are ‘a diaspora.’

2. The domestic diaspora are significantly more important than the international diaspora in the organisations of HTAs

The domestic diaspora are significantly more important than the international diaspora in the organisations of HTAs not only in terms of numbers of members, and amount of money given but also in their capacity to become involved in an everyday rather than just an intermittent way. The national diaspora has a better understanding than the international diaspora of the practicalities in and needs of the hometown.

3. HTAs have a particular interest in matters around death, reflecting a wider concern about death in the diaspora generally

- From their origin urban migrants associations have always been concerned with death and in particular with the repatriation of bodies for burial. HTA’s have in some cases been able to piggy-back onto these existing structures and have appropriated these networks for developmental ends
• Even in the context of Tanzania where there is considerable suspicion about HTAs because they are considered to be tribal, burial associations are universally acceptable
• Since repatriation is an elite concern (because it is expensive) the fact that HTAs are so concerned with repatriation reflects the fact that they are predominantly associations of the elite

4. It is at the crisis moments (such as deaths) that both the tensions and solidarities of the diaspora come to the surface.

Whilst membership of a diaspora group is often a long-term commitment many individuals only emphasize their diasporic identities in moments of crises. On the one hand this illustrates the powerful solidarity and unquestioning empathy of fellow members, but it can also involve an individual in asserting non-membership of other bodies, nations, families or churches... For this reason death is a particular telling vehicle through which to consider the experience of diaspora.

5. The different character and concerns of different diaspora groups shape the development work that their HTAs carry out.

The Cameroonian diaspora for example has more invested in a hometown burial, and the increasingly important role of the US diaspora in Cameroon has driven the vogue for constructing mortuaries.