



Death,
Mourning,
and Burial

A CROSS-CULTURAL READER

SECOND EDITION

Edited by

ANTONIUS C.G.M. ROBBEN

WILEY Blackwell

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Death and Anthropology: An Introduction

Antonius C. G. M. Robben

Every autumn, men and women in the United Kingdom wear red paper poppies to commemorate the British troops who died in World War I and later armed conflicts. Adopted in 1921, the modest symbol was inspired by the first two lines of a poem written in 1915 by John McCrea, a medical officer of the Canadian Expeditionary Force: “In Flanders fields the poppies blow / Between the crosses, row on row” (McCrae 1919). The poppy was only one of many reminders in the decade after the carnage of the Great War. More than nine hundred British military cemeteries dotted the landscapes of Belgium and France in 1918 (Hurst 1929). A Tomb of the Unknown Warrior was placed in Westminster Abbey in 1920 to honor unidentified soldiers. There were hundreds of thousands of psychiatric casualties, and many families continued to mourn their dead loved ones. Spirit photographs were taken on Remembrance Day in 1922 that showed the ghosts of fallen soldiers, and artists grappled in the interwar years with the sense of it all (Eksteins 1989; Mosse 1990; Winter 1995).

In 2014, a remarkable bed of red poppies sprouted at the foot of the Tower of London. Two artists had created the installation *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* to mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the British entry into World War I. The field of 888,246 hand-made ceramic poppies represented the number of British fatalities.¹ I visited the display on a Saturday afternoon in October 2014, and saw thousands of people lining the ramparts that surround the grounds. I struck up a conversation with a middle-aged couple from Cheshire. They had made the journey to London to see the open-air installation, and pay tribute to the relatives who had sacrificed their lives in the Great War. The woman’s grandfather had served as a young paramedic. He survived the war but never recovered from the mental shocks received across the Channel. Even though there was no one left in 2014 with a living memory of fighting the war, still nearly 4 million people came from all over Great Britain to see the display.² The annual commemorations, the works of art, and the personal mementos

gave the century-old dead a presence in people's consciousness which meant deceased relatives and compatriots continued to be remembered.

One of the casualties of World War I was the French anthropologist Robert Hertz. He was stationed near Verdun and died on April 13, 1915, after volunteering for an offensive mission towards Marchéville-en-Woëvre across open terrain defended by German machine guns (Parkin 1996: 13). Hertz (1905–6) had written what has become the single most influential text in the anthropology of death, of which large portions are reproduced in this anthology. The elaborate death rituals of the Dayak in Kalimantan, Indonesia, may seem far removed from the hasty burial of massive numbers of dead in World War I and the collective prayers said for their souls at public war funerals (Capdevila and Voldman 2006). Yet, the two mortuary practices share a general concern for carrying out society's social and moral obligations to the dead, and show analogies in the representation and destiny of the lamented souls. Hertz writes that the soul's departure for the land of the dead after reburial is not necessarily permanent: "In certain Indonesian societies the appeased souls are actually worshipped, and they then settle near the domestic hearth in some consecrated object or in a statuette of the deceased which they animate: their presence, duly honoured, guarantees the prosperity of the living" (see Chapter 1). Are the paper and ceramic poppies not also imbued with the souls and memories of the dead, and does the playing of the "Last Post" in the Belgian town of Ypres – every day since 1928 – not only pay homage to the dead but remind us also of the tolls of war and the value of peace?

The anthropology of death has been struggling with the cultural diversity and structural similarity of mortuary rituals since the discipline's early days. Anthropologists and sociologists around the turn of the nineteenth century, such as Tylor (1930), Durkheim (1995), Hertz (1960), and Van Gennep (1960), compared funerary rituals and death cultures through their overarching evolutionary, functionalist, and structuralist approaches. This period ended when anthropologists like Malinowski (1954), Radcliffe-Brown (1933), Goody (1962), and Evans-Pritchard (1968) began to conduct long-term fieldwork. They revealed the varying collective responses to death, and showed that the Western understandings and scholarly interpretations of death and ritual differed significantly from those of

other cultures. The analytical pendulum swung back towards more comparative approaches during the 1970s and 1980s in such works as Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson (1976), Huntington and Metcalf (1979), Bloch and Parry (1982), and Palgi and Abramovitch (1984). At the same time, anthropologists continued to conduct ethnographic fieldwork but their studies differed from the earlier ethnographies because of the influence of postmodern, reflexive and deconstructive approaches in American anthropology. Without trying to be exhaustive, the most important monographs are Badone (1989), Catedra (1992), Clark-Decès (2005), Conklin (2001), Danforth (1982), Desjarlais (2003), Green (2008), Hinton (2005), Hockey (1990), Kan (1989), Klima (2002), Kwon (2006), Lock (2002), Nelson (2008), Parry (1994), Robben (2005), Rosaldo (1980), Sanford (2003), Scheper-Hughes (1992), Seremetakis (1991), Suzuki (2000), Verdery (1999), Vitebsky (1993), and Whitehead (2002). This rich ethnographic harvest from the 1990s and 2000s has been spurring renewed efforts to formulate more general models and comparative approaches to the study of death, as will be shown in Part I of this volume.

This cross-cultural reader combines foundational texts in the anthropology of death with enduring texts from the 1970s to the 1990s and recent works from the 2000s and 2010s. The latter texts have been selected because of their innovative contribution to the field by benefiting from insights developed in medical anthropology, the anthropology of violence and trauma, and memory studies. The Reader's first edition was organized along a trajectory from dying to afterlife (Robben 2004). This new edition pays closer attention to fields of interest in the anthropology of death that have the promise of opening future lines of research.

Conceptualizations of Death

At the turn of the nineteenth century, anthropologists were looking for universal features in the diverse cultural responses to death, particularly in funerary rituals and expressions of mourning. Later generations became absorbed in the mortuary practices themselves through meticulous ethnographies and sophisticated interpretations without trying to formulate the type of generalizing statements of their predecessors. Conceptualizing death, grief, and mourning was so daunting in the face of

the tremendous variation of funerary rituals that anthropologists shied away from general models and frameworks, with only few exceptions in the 1970s and 1980s as was mentioned above. In the early 1970s, Johannes Fabian (2004) bemoaned anthropology's parochialization, folklorization, and exoticization of death. An obsessive concern for cultural variation, the folkloric isolation of death as a self-contained experience, and a fascination with exotic mortuary practices inhibited the formulation of generalizations that transcended local peculiarities. This situation did not change in the following decades, but the need for general concepts and models was nevertheless felt as the ethnographies of death multiplied. In search of theoretical inspiration, anthropologists harked back to the work of Hertz and Van Gennep, often refreshing their models but only seldom engaging them critically. Some anthropologists, however, attempted to develop new concepts, models, and comparative frameworks. This section includes five comparative studies in the anthropology of death, namely two key articles by Hertz and Van Gennep from the 1900s, a text by Lifton and Olson from the 1970s, and two recent examples of comparative approaches by Hallam and Hockey, and Robben from the 2000s and 2010s.

The chapter by Robert Hertz, "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death," was published originally in 1905–6, and endures as a key text in the anthropology of death because of its comparative appeal. Hertz argued forcefully that the death of a human being is not exclusively a biological reality or confined to the individual sorrow of the bereaved relatives, but that death evokes moral and social obligations expressed in culturally determined funeral practices. Although Hertz restricts his analysis largely to the mortuary practices of South Asian tribal societies, he reveals a structure of great cross-cultural significance. In the excerpts included in this Reader, Hertz isolates the key elements in the secondary burials among the Dayak of Kalimantan, Indonesia. He points out that the inert body, the deceased's soul, and the surviving relatives play changing roles during the time between death and secondary burial; a time that he subdivides into two periods. First, there is the intermediary period during which (a) the inert body is temporarily stored or buried, (b) the soul of the deceased remains near the corpse, and (c) the bereaved relatives are

separated from society and enter into mourning. Clearly, death does not occur at one moment in time but is a drawn-out process. The dead person is still considered part of society, and his or her continued residence among the living obliges them to provide food, engage in conversation, and show respect as if he or she were still alive. In a similar way, the deceased's soul does not depart for the land of the dead but wanders in the vicinity of the corpse and frequents the places where the deceased used to dwell. The bereaved relatives fear the soul's wrath for past wrongdoing, and are prone to appease the soul through sacrifices, taboos, and mourning. Furthermore, their sadness and weakness experienced at the loss might contaminate others. These circumstances make the mourners stand apart from society. They cannot participate in its daily routines, and wear distinctive clothing and ornaments.

The second and final period begins when the body has disintegrated sufficiently, the soul has detached from the deceased, and the mourners have properly expressed their grief and carried out their social obligations. Hertz sums up this second period as follows: "The final ceremony has three objects: to give burial to the remains of the deceased, to ensure the soul peace and access to the land of the dead, and finally to free the living from the obligations of mourning" (see Chapter 1). In contrast to the temporary burial of the first period, the final burial is a collective affair through which the deceased joins the ancestors and the community bids him or her farewell. The surviving relatives can now end their mourning. They cleanse themselves ritually from the impurities of their extended proximity to death, change into new clothing, and reunite with the community.

Arnold van Gennep made an equally important contribution to the cross-cultural study of death by interpreting mortuary rituals as one among similar rites of passage: "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another" (Van Gennep 1960: 2–3). These transitions, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, are life crises that become the subject of elaborate elevation rituals as a person rises from one status to the next. These rituals take place in what Durkheim (1995) has called sacred time, and what Turner (1967) has named liminal time. Van Gennep's book *The Rites of Passage* (1960) was originally published in 1909. The chapter included in this collection discusses funerals.

Mortuary transition or elevation rituals have three distinct phases. First, there is a relatively short preliminary phase characterized by a rite of separation that isolates the corpse and the mourners from society, and makes them wear special clothing and observe certain taboos. The rite of transition takes place during the second or liminal phase that marks the passage from the land of the living to the afterworld. This phase has the most elaborate rituals because the journey is considered long and the deceased may have to be equipped with food, clothing, weapons, protective amulets, means of transportation, and a guide to lead the way. Finally, there is the postliminal rite of incorporation to indicate both the passage of the soul to the world of the dead and the return of the mourners to the bosom of society. The human remains are buried in a cemetery, placed in a tree, cremated, or separated in any other way from their temporary stay. The bereaved relatives join for a meal, sing songs or celebrate the final passage of the deceased. The mourning has come to an end, the social order has been restored, and the flow of everyday life is picked up again.

Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olson postulate the universal fear of death in the chapter “Symbolic Immortality” from their book *Living and Dying* (1974), and like Malinowski (Chapter 6), they consider the belief in immortality as its universal response. Lifton and Olson reconcile Freud’s emphasis on the finality of biological death – and the human need to believe otherwise – with Jung’s attention to people’s search for meaning and immortality through religious symbolization. Lifton and Olson find this symbolic immortality in five modes of expression. Biological immortality consists of extending life through one’s offspring, family name, tribe or nation. The creation of literature, art works, and knowledge leads to the author’s creative immortality. Theological immortality refers to beliefs in resurrection, reincarnation, rebirth, and a spiritual life after death. Natural immortality makes people part of an eternal universe and the interminable cycles of nature. Finally, experiential immortality concerns altered states of consciousness such as ecstasy, enlightenment, drug-induced highs, and collective effervescence. The fear of death impels people to procure these modes of symbolic immortality to overcome their innate death anxiety, and live meaningful lives in the promise of continuity with others. Society reaps the good works of these personal quests but may also

suffer its consequences when leaders pursue self-aggrandizing and megalomaniac projects through war, political repression, and economic exploitation. In the vein of Lifton and Olson, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has argued that people try to transcend the fear of death through culture and social organization. Culture is a defiant denial of death in the desire for meaning and immortality: “Without mortality, no history, no culture – no humanity” (Bauman 1992: 7).

Anthropology’s long-term interest in mortuary rituals and spirituality has its counterpart in archaeology’s study of material culture and funerary artifacts. Anthropology’s relative neglect of the material dimension of death cultures has been remedied by Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, who developed a conceptual framework for the anthropological study of the materiality of death and mourning. In the chapter “Remembering as Cultural Process,” from their book *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (2001), they emphasize that material objects mediate people’s memory of the dead, and give cultural meaning to death through multi-varied, polysemous materializations. Artifacts as diverse as monuments, clothes, photographs, bodily gestures, inscriptions, and texts influence memory because they are relational constructs produced through a mutual constitution of material objects and human beings (see Gell 1998; Ingold 2011; Knappett 2016). The multiple contemporary and historical meanings of artifacts, and the memories they evoke, are dependent on place, time, power, gender, and the body. Meanings vary whether the spatial setting is sacred or communal, public or collective, and domestic or intimate. Time also influences the relation of material culture and memory, and not just because of the passage of time. Annual commemorations with dignitaries, national flags, and memorial wreaths shape the memory of the dead in other temporal ways than periodic family visits to the cemetery or the daily recollection of a deceased loved one by glancing at his or her photo in the living room. Power and gender relations among the mourners, and between the dead and the bereaved, influence the meaning of material objects and the representations of the dead. Finally, the mediation of the relation between the dead and the living exists as much in material objects as in the body. Embodied and sensorial memories can take the shape of corporeal practices, such as forms of dress and bodily movements that are reminiscent of the deceased.

In my contribution to this section (Robben 2014), entitled “Massive Violent Death and Contested National Mourning in Post-Authoritarian Chile and Argentina,” I adapt a constructivist model of social psychology about personal mourning to an anthropological analysis of national mourning. The significance of the dual process model of coping with bereavement over other psychological models of mourning exists in its equal attention to the primary loss of a loved one experienced by the bereaved, and the secondary loss of restoring a shattered life. The model interprets personal mourning as a process of oscillation between the reality of confronting the death and grieving over the painful loss (loss orientation), and facing the reality of a life without the deceased (restoration orientation) by for instance being forced to sell a home that has become too expensive to maintain. The first loss is more directed towards the past, while the second loss is more future-oriented. I have applied this psychological model to the multiple oscillations in the national mourning of mass assassinations and disappearances in Chile and Argentina, but this framework can just as well be used to understand the dual mourning of families, social groups, and communities.

Chile and Argentina were suffering from dictatorial regimes in the 1970s and 1980s that disappeared and assassinated tens of thousands of citizens suspected of revolutionary ideas and armed actions. The national mourning of these losses differed in the two countries because of a distinct politics of oscillation that was propelled by national governments in competition with conflicting social groups. Chile was more oriented towards rebuilding the postconflict society through reparative justice, the memorialization of the repressive past, and concerted attempts to achieve national reconciliation. It confined the primary loss orientation to documenting the truth about state terrorism, and providing psychological and social assistance to the bereaved. Argentina’s oscillation weighed more heavily on the side of loss orientation by prosecuting perpetrators, exhuming mass graves, and actively remembering the disappeared with street protests, while the country’s restoration orientation remained limited to the failed amnesty of convicted perpetrators and halfhearted reparation measures. This dual process approach demonstrates that the conceptualization of death should always take the conceptualization of life after death into account because of their mutual influence.

Death, Dying, and Care

The inevitability of biological death made the German physician and psychologist Wilhelm Wundt assume that people are dominated by a universal fear of death. Bronislaw Malinowski (1954) challenged this idea in his 1925 essay “Magic, Science and Religion.” He indicates that this universal fear is complemented by an equally universal denial of death through a belief in immortality. These two attitudes translate into an ambivalent attachment of the living and the dead. Surviving relatives want to break and at the same time prolong their association with the deceased. Close relatives accompany the loved one during the dying process, care for the corpse, assume the social status of mourners, and display their grief in public. Mortuary rituals separate the living from the dead. The corpse is removed from the place of death and undergoes some sort of transformation through burial, mummification, cremation or consumption, thus betraying the ambivalent relation between the living and the dead. The mourners are concerned about the dangers of the corpse and the contamination by death, but there reigns also a sublime sense of spirituality, hope, and otherworldliness. Malinowski considers such religious imagination as a functional response to death because people loathe the idea of a final ending. They cling to a belief in a spiritual life after death by imagining the salvation of an eternal spirit from the visibly decaying corpse. Thus, religion gives people a comforting sense of immortality, while the mortuary practices restore the group that has been temporarily disturbed by the death of one of its members.

Evans-Pritchard’s study *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1968) provides a classic analysis of the cultural scenarios set in motion to deal with the disruptive consequences of a death caused by witchcraft. He notices that the Azande of southern Sudan distinguished between natural and magical causes of death. Snake bites, a collapsing granary or the wound of a spear were recognized as natural causes of death. However, these natural causes did not stand on their own but were related to secondary causes, usually witchcraft. Witchcraft made the victim cross the snake’s path, so both the witch and the snake killed the person. What happened when a person’s death was attributed to witchcraft? First, the bereaved relatives consulted a poison oracle (*benge*) to establish the cause of death. A noble

administered poison to a chicken, asked the oracle whether a particular person was a witch, and waited for the poison to take effect. If the chicken died, then poison was given to a second chicken to validate the first outcome. If the second chicken was spared, then the oracle had confirmed the suspicion of witchcraft and the surviving family would take revenge by magically killing the guilty witch or by demanding material compensation.

Organ transplants have placed a tremendous moral pressure on people to accept the assumption that death can be established unequivocally and at a precise moment in time. Margaret Lock, in her article “Living Cadavers and the Calculation of Death” (2004), compares American and Japanese understandings of death, and reveals how distinct notions of personhood can account for differences in the procurement of organs. North American clinicians and the general public alike have always considered people to be dead when the heart stopped beating and the lungs stopped breathing. The first successful heart transplant in 1967 required a new medical definition of death to protect the legal rights of donors and physicians, and allow for the procurement of organs. The US 1981 Uniform Determination of Death Act stated that someone was considered dead when an irreversible coma had set in because the unconscious person was effectively brain dead, even though the body continued to function with the aid of a respirator. This meant that the person was considered dead, but not his or her body or organs. As Lock writes: “The patient has, therefore, assumed a hybrid status – that of a dead-person-in-a-living-body” (see Chapter 8). Death as the final stage in a process of dying with elaborate social and cultural significance was medicalized and turned into a biological certainty that became measurable in terms of time and neurological activity. Culture retreated from the brain-dead body, and organ donation was couched in a moral discourse that turned consent into a social obligation, praised the gift of life, and promised biological immortality.

The general acceptance by North American society of the brain-death definition contrasts sharply with the situation in Japan. The Japanese government defined brain death in 1985, and instituted in 1989 a special committee to present an authoritative opinion. Even though the committee agreed on the principle of organ transplants and that a biological death is not the same as the death of a person, a committee minority emphasized that brain death should not be equated with human

death, which has been understood by the Japanese people as the absence of pulse, breathing, and pupil dilation. Many Japanese mistrusted the transplant surgeons who were believed to be eager to pronounce people brain dead to harvest their organs (Lock 2002: 167–71). A compromise was reached in 1997 when a law pronounced brain death as a particular form of death, and stipulated that organ donation required the written consent of the donor and the family. Contrary to the North American belief that the brain is the seat of personhood, the Japanese people believe that personhood exists in their social relations, relations that do not cease when the dying enter into an irreversible coma. Death is therefore not a precise event in time but an extended process that resists clinical definitions of brain death and makes people reluctant to donate their organs. Nevertheless, definitions of death are subject to change, and Lock expects that brain death will become more acceptable in Japan once the media begin to pay attention to the plight of potential organ recipients.

Egypt is another country where people’s beliefs about organ procurement can change. Sherine Hamdy explains in the chapter “All Eyes on Egypt” (2016) that Islamic scholars and religious leaders have been arguing since 1959 that the human soul and spirit are infinitely superior to the quickly decaying body, and that God will reward those who donate their remains for the benefit of others. Most Egyptians have nevertheless been against organ donation because they believe that the dead are capable of feeling, and deserve to be washed, shrouded, and treated with care before burial. This respect for the dead reflects also on the bereaved relatives, and opposes them to the invasive organ procurements. Furthermore, poor Egyptians have been highly suspicious of the corrupt public teaching hospitals where organs and corneas were repeatedly taken from their dead relatives without prior consent (Hamdy 2012). The misgivings about organ donation changed in 2011 when the brutal police repression of antigovernment street protests caused many eye injuries through the use of tear gas and rubber bullets. A cornea campaign was successful, according to Hamdy, because many protesters registered themselves as potential donors, and because the participation of doctors in the protests took away people’s suspicion of a medical establishment that used to sell organs on the black market. The donation of organs to blinded martyrs, who would then be able to continue the political

struggle, and the belief in a reward from God motivated protesters to pledge their organs when killed. In the end, a public eye bank was not created, and the donation campaign fell apart for lack of state support.

The chapter “The Optimal Sacrifice” by Rane Willerslev (2009) analyzes voluntary death among the Chukchi, who are reindeer herders on the Kamchatka peninsula in northeastern Siberia. The non-Christian Chukchi have a perspectivist worldview in which the world of the living mirrors the world of the dead (Viveiros de Castro 1998). Both the dead and the living keep reindeer herds, and live with their families in tents and villages, but aspects such as night and day, winter and summer, and bodily skin and soft tissue, exist in reverse order. The world and the otherworld are communicating vessels in which a fixed number of souls circulates between the living and the dead in an endless cycle of renewal because body and soul are not different entities but each other’s flip side. This renewal is conditioned, however, by the superiority of the deceased over the living, and by the control and ownership of the life-giving souls by the dead. Reindeer and other surrogates for human beings are sacrificed to dissuade the deceased from demanding the return of the life-giving souls, and thus cause death or suicide in the world to welcome a deceased relative back in the otherworld. Willerslev distinguishes three forms of voluntary death: euthanasia, suicide, and sacrifice. Euthanasia refers to the abandonment of the sick and the aged in the inhospitable circumpolar North in order not to burden healthy relatives. Suicide among the Chukchi implies an identification of the victim with his or her deceased other, while the ritual blood sacrifice of a human being separates the victim from the deceased ancestor and differentiates the realms of life and death to make human existence possible. Sacrificial voluntary deaths occur most often at times of crisis, such as the bubonic plague or mass animal death, when the living need the help and protection of their more powerful dead ancestors. Care for the living and the common good will then persuade elderly Chukchi to sacrifice their lives to their ancestors.

Sacrifice and care are also central to hospices. Ann Julienne Russ (2005) shows in her article “Love’s Labor Paid for: Gift and Commodity at the Threshold of Death” that hospice workers in San Francisco were torn between the emotional need to provide compassionate care and the institutional demand of efficiency and profit. The

hospice movement began in Great Britain in the 1960s with volunteers who provided human dignity to a dying process that had become increasingly institutionalized and commodified. The individualized treatment of terminally ill cancer patients in hospitals had displaced family care in the home of dying loved ones. The hospice provided palliative care and a dignified death in a welcoming environment. The movement soon spread to the United States, but its humanistic holism came under pressure in the 1990s when neoliberalism transformed hospices into commercial institutions. Hospice workers in San Francisco were looking after rising numbers of young gay men with HIV/AIDS, and they had difficulty reconciling the gift of unconditional love with the commodification of care through strict work schedules and protocols. Russ emphasizes that the hospice caregivers were not balancing opposed demands, as if these were measurable services, but that they themselves comprised the services that were dispensed as gifts and commodities. Instead of volunteers providing collective care, as was originally intended by the hospice movement, now each employee had to solve these contradictory demands individually and within themselves. The decision about how much care to give and how much care to withhold became a formation of self through which the gift of care and sacrifice was reciprocated with the patient’s gift of dying in their arms.

Grief and Mourning

Émile Durkheim has had a lasting influence on the anthropology of death by emphasizing that the individual grief experienced at the death of another human being is expressed collectively in culturally prescribed ways of mourning. Crying relates in the same way to grief as weeping and wailing relate to mourning. Mourning is not a spontaneous emotion but a collective obligation manifested in appeasement rituals. In his classic work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim (1995) draws upon ethnographic accounts of Australian Aborigines to argue that the spontaneity of their wailing is deceptive, because all these expressions are clearly prescribed, controlled, and monitored by the community. Durkheim’s explanation of such rituals is that the death of an individual diminishes the group numerically and socially. Durkheim was fascinated by questions of social order and disintegration. This Hobbesian puzzle becomes

particularly pressing in the case of death. Indifference to a death expresses a lack of moral and cultural unity, and an absence of social cohesion and solidarity. Instead, collective mourning helps to draw people closer together and invigorates the weakened social group. This social function of mourning rituals is not limited to the death of individuals. Mourning is a general expression of loss for a social collectivity under threat, as is demonstrated by Aboriginal rites for illness, famine, drought, and the desecration of religious symbols. Grief and mourning should therefore always be understood in relation to other losses that provoke personal and collective crises (Freud 1968).

Radcliffe-Brown (1964) demonstrates in the excerpt from his ethnography *The Andaman Islanders* how weeping and embracing are collective performances rather than spontaneous personal expressions of sorrow or happiness. The Andamanese can cry on demand when required by society. Radcliffe-Brown even suggests that these cultural practices produce the emotions which they are obliged to express, and affirm the social attachments that hold society together. He delineates seven occasions of ceremonial weeping related to initiations, marriages, deaths, friendships, and peace-making. These rites are subdivided into two varieties: reciprocal or symmetrical rites (meeting of friends or relatives, peace-making ceremonies, communal mourning) and one-sided or asymmetrical rites (wailing over a corpse, weeping over initiated novices and newly weds). The practice of embracing at reciprocal rites expresses the emotional attachment of two persons, while weeping provides relief from built-up tensions. This dual function becomes clear at the end of a mourning period when secluded mourners renew their social ties with the community. Weeping is a general response to loss, as shown not only in mortuary rituals but also in weddings and initiation ceremonies. Asymmetrical rites signify affective and collective attachments, and are expressed by embracing and weeping over the inert body, the novice or the newly wed. In the case of death, weeping and embracing manifest the social attachment of the living and the dead, enhance the social solidarity of the survivors, and mend the weakened social collectivity.

Renato Rosaldo reveals in "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," his introduction to *Culture and Truth* (1989), how the accidental death of his wife Michelle in 1981 deepened his understanding of bereavement among the

Ilongot of the Philippines. Bereaved Ilongot men used to engage in headhunting to dispel the rage embedded in their grief by severing and casting away the head of an unsuspecting victim. For the Ilongot, "grief, rage, and headhunting go together in a self-evident manner" (see Chapter 13). His wife's unfortunate fall to death during fieldwork provoked an unsuspected anger and rage in Rosaldo resembling that of bereaved Ilongot men. This personal reaction made him eventually shift his analysis from headhunting as a ritual manifestation of bereavement to headhunting as an expression of grief, rage, and emotional loss. A reinterpretation of the ethnographic record showed that headhunting was a common Ilongot response to severe loss. Not only the death of a close relative, but also dramatic life transitions made young Ilongot men boil over with anger and make them eager to take a head. Decades after his wife's tragic fall, Rosaldo (2014) published an anthropoetic exploration of his grief and the sorrow of the Ilongot at her death.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes has taken the cultural construction of bereavement one step further by arguing that not only mourning but grief itself is a product of culture. In the excerpts from her ethnography *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (1992), she points out that mothers in a northeast Brazilian shantytown are aware of the structural causes of high infant mortality (poverty, malnutrition, poor health care) as well as the immediate causes (diarrhea, communicable diseases). Still, they endow babies with a life force, a will to live, whose strength will ultimately determine whether or not an infant survives. This belief makes mothers withhold food from weak, passive babies and give more food to strong, active babies. These Brazilian mothers accept the death of their weak infants stoically. Crying is even considered detrimental to the babies because the heavy tears on the thin angel wings burden their flight to heaven. Scheper-Hughes emphasizes that the maternal aloofness does not cover a deep sorrow, and the absence of a display of grief is not the repression of an inconsolable loss. The mother feels pity rather than grief for the baby.

Grief is commonly understood as people's struggle with the emotions surrounding a close death. Glenn Shepard demonstrates that grief may also include the sense of loss experienced by the dead on their departure from the living. In the chapter "Three Days for Weeping," Shepard (2002) explains how the Matsigenka

of southeast Peru attribute illness and death to sexual assaults by ghosts, demons, and sorcerers that occur when people are dreaming or walking alone in the rainforest. Illness makes the soul (*suretsi*) leave the body temporarily, and only a shaman and herbal medicine can bring the soul back to the withering body. Death implies the slow but permanent detachment of the soul from the violated body. The lonely soul remains near the corpse as a rotten-smelling ghost that has such longing for the bereaved relatives that it wants to carry their souls to the afterworld, while in the meantime gathering all material possessions to imitate an earthly existence in the land of the dead. The mourners therefore fear and dehumanize the dead, and protect themselves from contamination by shaving their heads and painting their faces with a red dye to disguise themselves as red-spotted jaguars. Shepard argues that the bereaved have strong personal feelings of grief but do not express them in public mourning. The Matsigenka control their emotions over death, and have only a modest tearless burial, because any display of negative emotions may cause illness, social disruption, and eventual death.

The classification of animals and humans into different categories has been debated since Darwin developed the theory of evolution. Neuroscientists and anthropologists have described the unique cognitive abilities of human beings (Edelman 1992; Shore 1996), whereas primatologists have emphasized the similarities of humans and primates, and shown that both have the capacity for empathy (de Waal 2002; 2009). In “The Expression of Grief in Monkeys, Apes, and Other Animals,” Barbara King (2013a; see also 2013b) defines animal grief as the visual emotional manifestation of loss at the death of a loved group member. This emotional reaction is preceded by demonstrable signs of attachment between the two individuals by spending more time together than needed to survive. Animal grief exceeds therefore the distress shown at deaths that threaten survival, such as a weakened group defense or a lower reproduction rate. Visible signs of grief among monkeys and great apes include particular vocal or facial expressions, and the loss of appetite, weight, and social interaction. King takes great care in weighing the indirect evidence of nonhuman animal grief, and proposes a combination of field observations and physiological data, especially the stress hormone profiles. King concludes that a better understanding of animal

grief will benefit the welfare of monkeys, apes, elephants, and dolphins in captivity. The same conclusion can be extended to human beings, as the importance of mortuary rituals and the emotional cost of the inability to bury one’s dead will show in Part IV.

Mortuary Rituals and Epidemics

Mortuary rituals are a true cultural universal that show people’s resistance to accepting biological death as a self-contained event, and express the desire to prolong the separation of the living and the dead through a process of phased transitions. The structuralist approaches developed by Hertz and Van Gennep continue to be important for the anthropology of death because they offer analytical frameworks that can be applied to every mortuary ritual. Still, the mortuary rituals on which Hertz and Van Gennep based their models existed in relative isolation. Mortuary rituals in this day and age are influenced by processes of globalization, and can no longer be taken for granted because of state authorities that prohibit indigenous funerary practices, disappear the dead, and control the disposal of the victims of ebola and HIV/AIDS, as is shown in Part IV.

The Brazilian authorities were shocked to learn in the 1960s that the Wari’ of western Amazonia consumed their deceased relatives. The integrity of the body, the sacredness of the corpse, and the burial of human remains are so deep-seated in Western culture that such endocannibalism could only provoke horror. Government officials and missionaries therefore forced the Wari’ to bury their dead. From the Wari’s perspective, however, not the eating of the dead but the Western practice of abandoning them to rot away in cold, uncaring soil was callous and heartless. Beth Conklin explains in her chapter “Hunting the Ancestors: Death and Alliance in Wari’ Cannibalism” that the mortuary cannibalism was a consequence of the reciprocal relation between humans and animals (Conklin 1993). Social ties continue to embody the corpse upon biological death as the deceased’s spirit materializes into a white-lipped peccary. Rather than merciless, endocannibalism was an expression of compassion for the bereaved relatives, helped severing the ties of the living and the dead, and contributed to the community’s subsistence by effectuating the transformation of humans into animals. The physical separation of the blood relatives from the corpse, and its subsequent dismemberment by

the affines, were the most emotional moments of the funeral. After all, the cutting implied the severing of the embodied social ties, resembled the butchering of game, and marked the spirit's departure for the ancestral underwater world. Not the blood relatives, but the affines ate the roasted flesh and organs. This rite of transition dissipated grief by the consumption of the sociophysical body and its embodied identity and social ties. Most important, the practice resuscitated the Wari' spirit under water, and foreshadowed its incarnation into a peccary. This transformation from human into animal showed that the deceased cared for the surviving relatives by providing them with game for their subsistence. Grief ended after shamans had talked to the spirits embodied in hunted peccaries, and could provide comfort to the bereaved relatives by communicating the deceased's well-being (see Conklin 1995; 2001).

The Argentine people have agonized for decades over the predicament and unceremonious burial of thousands of citizens who were disappeared by the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. In the chapter "State Terror in the Netherworld: Disappearance and Reburial in Argentina" (Robben 2000), I describe how the Argentine armed forces and police used the disappearance of political opponents as a terror tactic to intimidate their comrades-in-arms, paralyze family protest, and exploit the cultural belief in the relation of body and spirit. The Argentine military abducted tens of thousands of civilians, kept them in captivity for months on end, and finally assassinated most of them. Their remains were cremated or buried in mass graves. One of the most gruesome assassinations was carried out by the Navy, which sedated its captives and dropped them from airplanes flying across the South Atlantic Ocean. After misleading the Argentine people for several years about the real fate of the disappeared, the Argentine military discovered to their dismay the political and especially emotional force of people's need to bury and mourn their dead. Incessant human rights protests helped to topple the regime, and allowed for the exhumation, identification, and reburial of hundreds of disappeared Argentines. The reburials manifested the Argentine belief in a political life after death, a life which the military wanted to extinguish and the relatives were determined to resurrect. The violent death of the disappeared contributed therefore directly to the survival of their spirit and their continuing influence on Argentine politics.

Mortuary rituals are not necessarily determined by strict cultural scenarios, as was implied by the work of Hertz and Van Gennep. Diane O'Rourke analyzes in her article "Mourning Becomes Eclectic" (2007) how the disinterment and reburial of ossified human remains in the Greek village of Lehonía has become more diverse and family oriented since the 1990s. In the past, the bones were exhumed, cleaned, and collected in a cotton cloth several years after the deceased had been buried during an elaborate funeral. The bundle was then reburied almost without ritual or post-disinterment attention to express people's equality before death, conclude the obligations to the dead, and mark the end of mourning. Social control enforced these cemetery practices; practices enhanced communal solidarity and restrained outward displays of grief. Today, family identity and the continued emotional expression of grief and remembrance have become more prominent. The exhumed bones are collected in boxes and adorned with flowers, mementos, and oil lamps. O'Rourke argues that the community's fear of death, shared religious beliefs, and conformity to scripted rituals have been replaced by an eclectic funerary culture that makes room for people's personal experience of death, and has given rise to ongoing disputes about the proper form and meaning of cemetery practices. She shifts the analysis of cemetery practices from the finality of death to the dynamics of personal and public life. In addition, O'Rourke positions the disinterments beyond the realm of liminality, and describes a complex feedback process between death practices and the social changes of everyday life. This process has resulted in the decline of a moral community of Christians, and the increasing public display of grief, social distinction, and family ties.

The world's HIV/AIDS epidemic has had considerable repercussions on death cultures, in particular when care, mourning, and burial rise above people's emotional and economic means. The chapter "'We Are Tired of Mourning!'" by Liv Haram (2010) reveals that the changing funeral practices between rich and poor among the Christian Meru of northern Tanzania were as much due to greater socioeconomic developments as to the numerous HIV/AIDS-related deaths. According to the Meru, the death rate rose rapidly in the 1990s because of the arrival of modernity or "progress" (*maendeleo*) that caused more geographic mobility, traffic accidents, interethnic mixing, alcohol and drug

abuse, conspicuous consumption, and especially sexual promiscuity. Funerals of people who died of natural causes used to be elaborate communal affairs in which hundreds of relatives were fed for three to four days. The increasing number of funerals since the 1990s has impoverished some households, and made low-income families reduce the funeral to the day of burial. Instead, wealthy families have turned funerals into displays of conspicuous consumption with special mortuary clothing, a brass band, and professional cooks who prepare elaborate meals. At the same time, there has been pressure from nongovernmental organizations, and state and religious authorities, to limit the funeral and mourning to one day in order to lower costs and cut down on work absenteeism. The burden of caring for relatives with HIV/AIDS and mourning the death has fallen squarely on Meru women, and might possibly lead to their emotional withdrawal as they struggle to attend to everyone's needs.

Remembrance and Regeneration

The idea of death as the end of life, as an irreversible event or final station, is strong in the Western world, but many cultures have processual, cyclical or stage-like notions of death (Desjarlais 2016; Obeyesekere 2002). The strict division between the living and the dead exists in certain cultures but not in others. The selections in Part V focus on complex relations between the living and the dead through the intervention of spirits or the state. People may maintain an ongoing interaction with animate or embodied spirits, as Kopytoff (Chapter 21) and Bacigalupo (Chapter 22) demonstrate, whereas Kwon (Chapter 23) and Ferrándiz (Chapter 24) show that a powerful state may try to influence people's commemoration and remembrance of the dead.

Igor Kopytoff critiques in his article "Ancestors as Elders in Africa" (1971) the division between elders and ancestors made by Western anthropologists in their studies of African societies, and warns about the perils of ethnocentrism. These scholars described the authority of elders and the influence of powerful ancestors on the daily lives of their descendants correctly but, according to Kopytoff, they wrongfully imposed on them the Western life–death dichotomy. This bias made them conceptualize the respect of elders for their ancestors as ancestor cults and ancestor worship. Kopytoff examines

the meaning of the key term *bambuta* (singular: *mbuta*) that means among the Suku of southwestern Congo-Kinshasa literally 'the big ones' or those who are older than oneself. The term applies both to elders and ancestors, or better, to living elders and dead elders or ancestors. Elders and ancestors do not pertain to the two discrete categories of the living and the dead but exist on a continuum that ranks them from younger to older, and from lower to higher status. Elders and ancestors are equally respected, and asked for support in times of sickness and misfortune, but whereas junior kinsmen and older kinsmen can speak face to face and maintain reciprocal relations, living elders can only make requests to dead elders in monologues and by making sacrifices at their grave or at a crossroad. Kopytoff argues that the Western cultural tradition attributes supernatural powers to the dead but does not believe in similar powers among the living, and therefore made Western anthropologists differentiate between elders and ancestors in African societies.

Ana Mariella Bacigalupo shows in her article "The Life, Death, and Rebirth of a Mapuche Shaman" (2010; see also 2016) how among the Chilean Mapuche the living and the dead, mythical time and worldly time, and personal and national histories are not separate but interacting ontologies through the mediation of shamans. Mapuche shamans (singular and plural: *machi*) can heal people, influence the future, and control human and natural disasters through their spiritual powers. Bacigalupo examines Mapuche shamanism through the lives, deaths, and rebirths of Rosa Curin and Francisca Colipi, who became thunder shamans after being struck by lightning. They were able to muster the force of deities, spirit animals and ancestral spirits to protect the Mapuche from earthquakes, massive floods, and attacks by the Chilean army. Their eventual deaths were feared because the living spirit (*püllu*) could become malevolent and harm the community. Francisca Colipi's corpse was therefore buried together with her slashed shamanic drum, and her earthly possessions were destroyed to prevent her spirit from remaining near the inert body. Her house was moved, and people no longer mentioned her name to cut her social and spiritual ties with the living. This process of deindividuation made the villagers forget Francisca Colipi and allowed her spirit to join the collective ancestral spirit (*fileu*). After several years, she was remembered again, but now in a collectivized way

that will eventually allow her spirit and personality to reincarnate in a granddaughter. Oral narratives about shamans such as Rosa Curin and Francisca Colipi create a shamanic historical consciousness for the villagers that intertwine Mapuche agency and national Chilean history, and demonstrate their identity and self-determination. Furthermore, the interventions of Mapuche spirits in cataclysmic events make historical processes and human actions follow the cosmic cyclical pattern of order and chaos, and good versus evil.

Heonik Kwon shows in his article “The Ghosts of War and the Spirit of Cosmopolitanism” (2008) how citizens and the state may clash over public death rituals and whether the dead deserve universal respect and commemoration. After Vietnam’s reunification in 1976, martyr cemeteries came to displace communal temples as places of commemoration, and domestic ancestor altars were used to venerate war heroes and revolutionary leaders (Kwon 2006: 104). The inhabitants of former South Vietnam were only allowed to honor the dead heroes of the victorious socialist revolution. Vietnamese and American soldiers who died fighting on the imperialist side were not commemorated, and neither were civilians who had been massacred by American troops, as happened in 1968 to hundreds of villagers in My Lai. They were condemned to wander around as unmourned ghosts. Torn by the opposed political, familial, and moral obligations to the dead, villagers built inconspicuous roadside shrines for the spirits of the nonlocal and foreign dead (Kwon 2006: 67–8). The state’s politicization of the dead grew weaker when the planned economy faltered in the mid-1980s. Economic reforms opened the market and brought also more political and religious freedom that changed the ritual relation to the dead. Local initiatives lead to the erection and renovation of three types of shrines. Domestic ancestral altars became once more the ritual center to commemorate three generations of ancestors, irrespective of their state-defined status as heroes, traitors, or passive civilian victims. Communal ancestral temples were raised in the public domain to worship local deities and distant ancestors. Finally, shrines that looked like birdhouses were built on the boundary of the house and the street as abodes for wandering nonlocal and enemy ghosts. Kwon interprets these ghost shrines as manifestations of a cosmopolitan ethics of hospitality and memory towards the unrelated

dead that coexists with the familial and communal solidarity and remembrance expressed through altars and temples.

Spain is another country in which civilians and the state clashed over the moral and political framing of the dead of war. Francisco Ferrándiz analyzes in the chapter “The Intimacy of Defeat: Exhumations in Contemporary Spain” (2010) the resurgent public memory of more than one hundred thousand civilians interred in thousands of mass graves since the Spanish Civil War of 1936–9. The victorious Nationalist forces commanded by General Franco had executed these civilians because of their collaboration with the Republican government. Franco’s death in 1975 ended dictatorial rule but did not encourage an investigation of its crimes. The new democratic government passed an amnesty law in 1977 that imposed a collective silence on Spain to preserve its political stability. It was only in the year 2000 that a grassroots movement began to exhume the mass graves and narrate the lives of the dead that had been abandoned by the state. Ferrándiz demonstrates how this popular movement finally brought the unspoken memories to light, and how the mediatization of narratives and exhumations was affecting people’s historical consciousness. Public pressure made Congress pass a Historical Memory Law in 2007 that condemned the Franco dictatorship, acknowledged the victimhood of both parties to the Civil War, and expressed official support for the exhumation of mass graves. The exhumation movement, survivor testimonies, and artistic expressions added new meaning to Spain’s political past, but without displacing the voices of the dictatorship’s ideological supporters. The diverse memories of the dead or their ghosts, as Ferrándiz calls them metaphorically, were not extinguished by six decades of state repression, and continue to haunt the Spanish state and its divided society.

Future of the Anthropology of Death

The anthropology of death is a continuously evolving field of study because of ongoing technological, empirical, and global developments that are redefining the meaning of life and death. Biotechnology is prolonging lives through organ transplants, stem cell treatments, and perhaps even cryonics, while death is lent a hand by improved palliative care and physician-assisted suicide.

Also, the anthropology of death's empirical attention to violence, suffering, and trauma has erased the strict analytical boundaries between life and death, ritual and everyday life, and mourning and memory. The study of death can no longer be confined to a particular realm of society and culture, as older generations of anthropologists assumed, because current research has shown the many continuities and interconnections of life and death. Finally, the study of globalization has made anthropologists more aware of the politics of death, and the uneven distribution of disease, care, and treatment. These shifts in the anthropology of death have taken place during the last few decades and are steering research in at least five new directions: critique, materiality, attachment, ontology, and memory.

The contributions of Hertz and Van Gennep to the anthropology of death have been invaluable and continue to inspire contemporary scholars (Davies 2000; Hockey 2002), but their seminal texts also come across as overly schematic with scant attention to issues of temporality, narrativity, subjectivity, and the multiplex affective relations between the deceased and the bereaved. The dichotomies of life and death, body and soul, and world and afterworld are powerful analytical tools that reveal important structural features but at the same time conceal other realities and neglect mutual influences. The ethnographies of death practices in Greece by O'Rourke (Chapter 19), and restless ghosts in Vietnam by Kwon (Chapter 23) are excellent examples of how to go beyond the founding fathers of the anthropology of death by demonstrating the place of death in people's everyday and political lives. This critique may even be extended to the dichotomy of human beings and animals, as done by King (Chapter 16), who hints at the similarities between human grief and animal grief.

The anthropology of death can benefit from the discipline's renewed interest in material culture and the more recent field of heritage studies to examine the multiple materialities of death. The destruction of cities and material culture deserves to be analyzed in terms of the concepts of loss and mourning (Bevan 2007; Meng 2011). The analysis of visual representations of death, pioneered by Ariès (1983), is in need of a fresh impulse from today's sophisticated visual research methods. Finally, personal objects and memento mori deserve

closer scholarly attention to the ways they mediate death and mourning, as shown by Hallam and Hockey (Chapter 4).

Grief and mourning continue to be central research topics in the anthropology of death. Many anthropologists have embraced the assumption that grief and mourning vary cross-culturally but that the bereaved will eventually accept the losses and sever their ties with the deceased. However, the attachment of the living and the dead turns out to be stronger than commonly assumed. Studies in sociology and social psychology have shown that the bereaved may not break their bonds with the dead but transform them into active relations (Klass, Silverman, and Nickman 1996; Walter 1999). Likewise, anthropological research has demonstrated that the dead may remain present in the lives of the bereaved through inner conversations, cemetery visits, and spiritual interventions (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005; Green 2008; Kwon 2006). The works by Bacigalupo (Chapter 22), Kopytoff (Chapter 21), and Robben (Chapter 18) offer different cultural illustrations of the continued ties between the living and the animate, incarnated, and political spirits of the dead.

Related to the post-mortem continuity of social bonds is the notion that life and death do not constitute coexisting ontologies but can be regarded as interconnected. The separation of life and death has deep Indo-European and Judeo-Christian roots, and can be found in the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic and the Book of Genesis (Davies 2005). The works of Hertz and Van Gennep fit in this legacy, but ethnographic research has shown that life can be regarded as a form of death or that life and death coexist in cyclical forms (Mimica 1996; Obeyesekere 2002; Parry 1994; Willerslev, Chapter 10). Kaufman and Morgan (2005) have delineated a stimulating research agenda for an analysis of the permeable boundaries and biopolitics of life and death. The articles by Lock (Chapter 8) and Hamdy (Chapter 9) are exemplary case studies of this line of research. They describe different cultural definitions of life and death, and show the state's influence on the procurement of organs.

Finally, anthropologists have examined ethnohistorical understandings of death and grief (Rosaldo 1980; Conklin 2001), and interpreted mourning through embodied memory (Connerton 2011). Others have written intimate accounts about the lives of family

members during the Holocaust (Rylko-Bauer 2014; Slyomovics 2014; Waterston 2014). Recent historical works about the memory of death can give a new direction to the anthropological study of death and mourning (e.g. Black 2010; Confino, Betts, and Schumann 2011; Laqueur 2015; Seaman 2010). Ferrándiz (Chapter 24) and Robben (Chapter 18) provide two examples of how to enrich the anthropology of death with an emphasis on memory. At the same time, the research focus should not lie only on how people remember the dead but also on how the dead make the living remember them. People leave legacies in the awareness that life will end some day, and they may influence the memories that will survive them.

NOTES

- 1 “About the installation,” at <http://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/tower-of-london-rememberers/about-the-installation/> (accessed December 2016).
- 2 “Tower of London Poppy Display Wins the Hearts of Millions,” BBC Newsround, November 11, 2014, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/29993097> (accessed December 2016).

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Part I

Conceptualizations of Death

