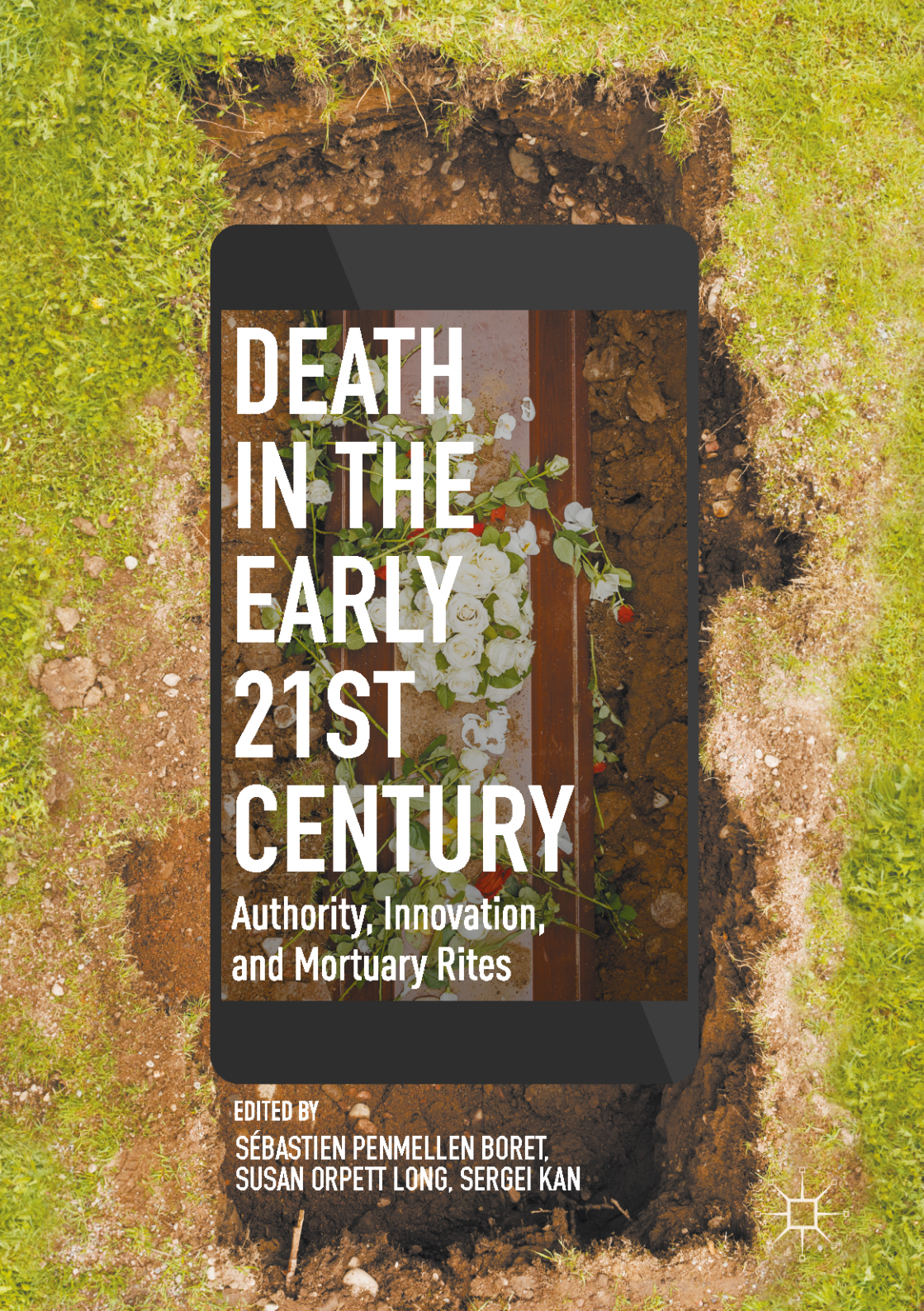
DEATH IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY
Authority, Innovation, and Mortuary Rites
EDITED BY
SÉBASTIEN PENMELLEN BORET, SUSAN ORPETT LONG, SERGEI KAN

Death in the Early Twenty-first Century

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Editors

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If the outcome belongs to each and every author of this book, Susan, Sergei, and I remain indebted to all the people involved in bringing this project to completion. We hope that this volume constitutes a modest but hopefully noteworthy milestone in the anthropology of death.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Sébastien Penmellen Boret, Susan Orpett Long and Sergei Kan

Since its beginnings, the discipline of anthropology has encompassed the study of death, describing the centrality of its rituals in our lives, the richness of its material culture, and its multilayered functions and meanings in societies past and present. Looking at mortuary rites, anthropologists examine the ways a community deals with the departure of the deceased and the disposal of his or her remains, material and immaterial. To the Western reader this would usually imply a funeral, followed by burial or cremation. Yet anthropological research has shown tremendous variety in practices across the

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globe, including secondary burials, feasts, and commemoration of death anniversaries, from ancestor veneration in East Asia to the Jewish custom of *yahrzeit*. Anthropologists have come to conceptualize death rituals as rites of passage for the individual and the community, focusing on death not as an ending, but rather as an occasion for restoring social equilibrium and promoting sociocultural continuity (Hertz 1907; Van Gennep 1960). Viewing death as part and parcel of daily life in a community, more social and cultural anthropologists came to focus on the ways ideas and practices of death relate to complex sociocultural, economic, and technological domains within societies.

Building on these earlier insights, anthropological research on death beginning in the last years of the twentieth century has paid increased attention to the broad and dramatic changes experienced by much of the world due to colonialism and post-colonialism, and the increasing impact of global capitalism. In addition, large-scale migration and new communicative technologies have provided alternative ways to view the relation between the individual and society, and new economic structures have changed and expanded political power and social interaction. All of these potentially challenge customary ways of performing and thinking about funerals and memorialization. If it was ever true in the past that customs were relatively unquestioned, globalization and the Internet revolution have dramatically affected the scale and the speed at which contemporary global trends are recreated, used for new purposes, and applied practically. Alternative rituals and meanings drawn from elsewhere are selectively incorporated into local contexts and inspire new interpretations.

This volume goes a step further, contributing to "anthropology's toolbox" (Knauft 2006) for the study of death by asserting that funerary rituals and memorial rites not only reflect but also provide a conduit for cultural change, as the meaning and place of the individual in society are redefined in the context of new ideas, practices, and technologies. Its eight essays focus on a wide range of societies based on field work carried out in the early twenty-first century. The authors' rich descriptions from places with varying geographies, religions, and economies allow us to explore changes and question broadly the ways people face death, conduct ritual, and recreate the deceased in memory and in the material world. In all situations, agency to act in response to death and authority to make decisions about ritual and memorialization are challenged, reasserted, and negotiated in the context of changing ideas and technologies.

The Anthropology of Death and Sociocultural Change

Among the first anthropologists to focus on death as a significant cultural and biological event, Robert Hertz (1881–1915) held that mortuary rites served to reestablish the original state of a society that had been disrupted by the death of an individual. One of Durkheim's most promising pupils, Hertz authored one of the foundational texts in the study of mortuary rites, *A Contribution to the Study of Collective Representation of Death*, published in the French journal *L'Année Sociologique* in 1907. This study is based on the mortuary practices he observed among the Dayak of Borneo as well as examples from Melanesia, Polynesia, Australia, and Native North America. Hertz argued that death ritual functions in society to simultaneously transform the corpse, the soul, and the bereaved, while the entire community returned to a state of equilibrium.[1] This approach to death has inspired the development of the anthropology of death well into the twenty-first century (see Goody 1962; Bloch 1971; Danforth 1982; Metcalf 1982; Kan 1989, 2015; Suzuki 2000; Conklin 2001).

Along with changes in anthropology more broadly, death studies in the field moved away from functionalism to emphasize ritual and symbolic dimensions of mortuary ritual (notably, Huntington and Metcalf 1991 and Bloch and Parry 1982). In these volumes, the social, cultural, and technological elements of death rituals are intertwined. Bloch and Parry distinctively examine the frequent "relationship between mortuary beliefs and practices and the legitimation of the social order and its authority structure," where individuals maintain their position of authority as well as the eternal order by "transforming the dead into a transcendent and eternal force," thus denying the arbitrariness and finality of individual death (Bloch and Parry 1982: 41). Other works have also recognized the significance of processes of exchange in mortuary rites, including Damon's edited volume on *Death Rituals and Life in the Society of the Kula Rings* (1989) and Barraud's (1994) *Of Relations and the Dead*. These essentially focused on the traditional authority of societies that are "based on unchanging eternal order grounded in nature or in divinity" (Palgi and Abramovich 1984: 391–392). Kan (1989, 2015) demonstrated in his study of the mortuary and memorial rites of the nineteenth-century Tlingit Indians of Alaska that this "unchanging eternal order" was grounded for the Tlingit in the ideal of an eternal existence of matrilineal kinship groups, which perpetually recycled their collectively owned personal names/titles and other tangible and intangible sacred possessions.

The rapidity of change widely experienced in societies throughout the world challenge past assumptions of a stable social order. These disruptions and transitions are being explored in newer approaches to the anthropology of death. Essays on mortuary rites in modern-day Africa in a volume edited by Jindra and Noret argue that funerals represent "occasions for the (re)production and the (un)making of both solidarities and hierarchies, both alliances and conflicts" as well as Durkheimian "moments of social communion in the face of death" (2011: 2). Earlier approaches to death rituals cannot offer a completely satisfactory picture of mortuary practices in societies "where authority and legitimacy are multiple" (2011: 4). Our volume continues that critique.

Although changes are experienced in local contexts, colonialism, post-colonialism, secularization, and globalization have resulted in changes that can be broadly identified across many societies, including transformations within their realms of death. For instance, the uniqueness of the Mexican version of All Soul's Day, such as its *carnivalesque* and macabre performances and its sweets in the shape of skulls and skeletons, is often thought to have originated in indigenous customs. However, recent research suggests that the Mexican "Day of the Dead" could also be "a colonial invention" resulting from demographic (epidemics and massacres), economic (sugar trade), and acculturation (Christianization) processes initiated by Spanish conquerors (Brandes 1997: 293). A similar relationship between mass death and mortuary rites can be found in African societies suffering from epidemics of HIV/AIDS since the 2000s. Scholars have suggested that the exponential increase of mortality there has contributed to rapid changes in the way people deal with death. In Kenya, the social stigma attached to victims of HIV/AIDS challenges the Christian belief in life after death, and seems to shift funerals from the public to the private domain, while in South Africa infected individuals are seen as "dead before dying" (Nzioka 2002; Niehaus 2007; see also Kilonzo and Hogan 1999).

Global changes affecting ideas and practices of death include increased ideological and physical control by the state over local ritual practices, the spread of so-called "world religions" and the simultaneous rise of fundamentalism and secularism. For example, scholars of colonial Africa have discussed the broad influence of missionaries and the colonial governments on the ways people negotiated their indigenous funerals and burials for the self-proclaimed "civilized" and "sanitized" mortuary rites. During the post-colonial era, struggles over the performance of death rites not only served debates over national identities and statehood, but also led

to the transformation of death practices by, for example, fusing Christian and pre-colonial imagery (Lee and Vaughan 2008: 345–355). New practices may challenge or accommodate previously existing beliefs about death, the afterlife, and what constitutes proper funerary and memorial ritual. Thus, as Merz describes in this volume, people in northwestern Benin perceive different options for burying the dead according to the "new ways" or the ancestral ways. New ways of burial become feasible as people reinterpret existing beliefs about how an individual's animating force, identity, and body interrelate before and after death. Also in this volume, Mathews and Kwong trace the correlation between beliefs about the afterlife and the way people live in affluent societies in which religious and secular ideologies coexist and intertwine. Many Japanese people Boret (Chapter 8) met who seek out ecological burial interpret traditional symbols of the regeneration and continuity of the immaterial life-force by envisioning their ashes as fertilizing the vegetation that marks and surrounds their burial places.

Colonialism and post-colonialism have also led to the experience of migration, raising questions about dying and death far from the home community. The violence and injury accompanying migration for economic and political reasons may lead to migrants' deaths where there are no appropriate kin and community members with the cultural expertise to perform customary death rites. To counter the uncertainties and meet the needs of migrants, traditions might be reinterpreted, once banned practices tolerated, and new practices accepted. The many examples include the taking of photographs of the washing and burial of the dead among the Muslim diaspora in Berlin, which, originally considered *haram* (forbidden), serve now both as proofs that the "proper" mortuary practices have been followed, and as mediums between the migrants and those living in the motherland (Jonker 1996). Chilean migrants in Sweden created a new ritual to compensate for the absence of burial, a "funeral in exile" (Reimers 1999). Migrants may contribute to the transformation of mortuary rites at home, like those of Ghana whose remittances to their family transformed funerals into lavish events (Mazzucato et al. 2006). As Seebach documents in this volume, even in the case of the death of those who do not leave, the immigrants' absence from funerals and memorial occasions is felt by those remaining at home, and alternatives sought to their timely presence. Another discussion of the colonial experience is Wanner's chapter on the incorporation of western Ukraine into the Soviet Union, with implications for ritual practice and the relationships with people newly considered to be among the ancestors.

Perhaps the most evident change of our time is the introduction and adaptation of new technologies. These may have a direct relation to death rituals, such as the nineteenth-century development of arterial embalming technology in the United States, leading to the possibility of delaying funerals or holding elaborate wakes. Modern arterial embalming has subsequently become more common elsewhere, such as France (Puymérail et al. 2005). In contemporary Africa, societies experiencing urbanization, migration, and war have also turned to refrigeration, embalming, and digital mourning, sometimes alongside traditional ideas and practices (Lee and Vaughan 2008: 343). Scholars have considered the ways in which new technologies complicate boundaries between life and death, and how they affect definitions of personhood (Lock 2002; Franklin and Lock 2003; Sharp 2007). The advancement of technology facilitates the ideology of death as an individual journey in which choices are made along the way. At the center of this notion are the anthropological distinction between biological and social death, questions of the relative authority of medical personnel and technology in these processes, and the idea of death becoming a "choice" (Lock 2003: 189) by individually drawing from a range of cultural scripts about dying (Long 2005). In some cases, the technology comes into being in totally unrelated contexts but is adapted for uses related to death. Kneese's chapter in this volume brings into focus care/memorial blogs for the dying on the Internet, but even the cameras of mobile phones can have an impact on people's ability to be part of ritual from a distance and on the interpretation of the nature of the death and ritual, as Seebach found in Acholi society.

Agency, Authority, and Memory in Changing Mortuary Practices

This volume argues that especially in changing sociocultural landscapes, the multiple agencies of the deceased, the survivors, and others recognized as legitimate cultural actors means that the authority to make decisions about and to interpret death practices is subject to negotiation, contestation, and resistance. Since the 1980s anthropological theory has ceased to focus *solely* on "anonymous and supra-individual entities," or structures. Bourdieu, among others, began to pay more attention to the central role of the actions and approaches adopted by individuals in

response to the *wider* social structures in which they live (Bourdieu 1977; see also Ortner 1984; Giddens 1984). However, anthropology also denies that individual agency can be independent of structure. Rather it insists that agency depends on culture for its form and actualization, and is internalized through action (Butler 1990) and the various disciplinary techniques of the social structure (Foucault 1995). At the same time, agency is not deterministic, so although human behavior, including rituals, generally reinforces the social structure, it can also produce and affirm alternatives to it. Understanding mortuary practices thus requires careful consideration of the workings of agency, authority, and the creation of memory in both the larger society and in the intimate spaces, which accommodate the underlying processes leading to the transformations and innovations of contemporary mortuary rituals.

Agency

With regard to death, the understanding of agency varies in different ethnographic contexts, consistent with local understandings of the human, natural, and supernatural worlds. Frequently, agency extends beyond humans, located in animals, in ritual items, in the state, and certainly in the deceased and his/her spirit, ghost, or soul. The need to exert human or godly control over other agents motivates much mortuary practice. In her chapter on death in Apiao, Bacchiddu relates that in this isolated community, which has experienced less directly and intensively the global forces outlined above, balancing the power of various agents involved in the death can be a significant post-mortem responsibility. Under conditions of more rapid social change, these understandings may be questioned, rejected, or altered. Some of our chapters shed light on the novel agency of actors who might have historically been absent from the process of decision-making. For instance, the chapters in Part III investigate the agency of the dead-to-be over his/her own funeral ceremony, referring to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's notion of "Death of One's Own, Life of One's Own" whereby choice over death rites is no longer a case of free will but an obligation imposed upon the individual to choose his/her own ways of death (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; see also Walter 1994; who draws on Giddens 1991). Likewise, people may attempt to control the way that they will be remembered after their death, such as designing and contracting for their own grave. Social, economic, and geographic mobility and the introduction of new ideologies lead to the

redefinition of what or who constitutes an agent. We are particularly struck by the ways that changes in agency may lead to ritual innovation, resulting in changes in the way death rites are conducted and interpreted. Transformations of death practices reflect both external, structural influence and local agency.

Authority

Of course potential agents may not all have the same ability to influence the consequences of the death. Decisions about ritual, life going forward, and the creation of the memory of the death and the deceased take place in contexts of unequal influence and power. In our book, we thus also draw upon the idea of authority and ask questions of which actors have cultural legitimacy, whose views matter more, and how broader changes in society can challenge those assumptions and customary practices. For example, several scholars have pointed to the historical increase in the intervention of the state in practices surrounding death (see Verdery 2000; Farrell 1980; Bernstein 2006). The varying relationship among religions, the state, and community and personal responses to death suggest that authority and control over mortuary rites and memory is differently located in different societies as well.

Historically, mortuary rituals, disposal of the body, and the memorialization of the dead were often matters of family and community concern but practices were grounded in worldviews that included assumptions about powerful supernatural agencies. Thus to the extent that a community had specialists to deal with supernatural matters, these ritual or religious leaders were seen as having authority, along with the family, elders, and so on over when and how things were done. With the growth of codified formal religious traditions, the authority of clerics was even stronger and religious institutions were considered responsible for creating the broad cosmological canvas underlying funerals and burial practices.

The development of a scientific understanding of the world, which viewed life and death as part of nature, began to challenge seriously the near-monopoly held by religious leaders on the subject of death. The surge of scientific thinking was strengthened by the Industrial Revolution, and in particular mass production of funerary goods, the advent of modern embalming, urbanization, and the dispersal of kinship networks (Mitford 1998; Ariès 1974; Kawano 2010; Suzuki 2000, 2013). This has resulted in highly industrialized, affluent settings in a sharing and to some degree, a

transfer of authority to private industry and to "experts" in funerary ritual and bodily disposal. As societies encounter some degree of "western" science, industrialization, and capitalism, elements of these newer practices may be presented, adopted, and adapted by local authorities and agents to suit their beliefs and practices, as some of the chapters in this volume attest. The politicization and secularization of mortuary practices is a significant trend in some of the ethnographic scenarios described in this volume, but agency and authority also play out in the more private spaces of people's lives. Claims to authority may include not only active resistance to the status quo, but also interpersonal struggles within a family or community that go unnoticed in the larger public sphere. Investigating negotiations in the intimate domain, our volume identifies the interrelationship between authority and agency in the lived space where structure and agency intersect. Despite contemporary ideologies of individual autonomy, negotiations and tensions among those involved in a death continue even in societies that encourage living wills and pre-arranged funerals. Thus, we argue, agency and authority have become the *sine qua non* of the contemporary studies of death-related practices.

Memory

It is also necessary to think about the ways that people claim legitimacy to define the life of the deceased and its significance. Memorialization refers to the processes creating social or collective memory through tangible (monuments, memorial sites) and intangible (ceremonies, narratives, etc.) acts of remembrance. Acts of *public* memorialization are often associated with the broader politics of national, ethnic, racial, and religious identities and the making of colonial histories (Halbwachs 1975; Connerton 1989; Nora 1989; Verdery 2000; Haas 1998). More recently, anthropologists have studied the making of memory in more intimate and personal domains such as that of kinship. Carsten (2007), for example, demonstrates how personal and collective memories are mutually entrenched in the understanding of relationships. In his study of death in the contemporary United States, Green (2008: 160) suggests that memory has replaced the religious emphasis on the afterlife in mortuary ritual, "committing the dead to living memory rather than a locale beyond the natural world" (p. 160). He goes on to talk about an American "cult of memory" that he finds to be a "distinctly postmodern idiom" in societies in which no other type of immortality seems possible. Yet the importance of

memory is highlighted in a variety of societies examined by the authors of this volume, and taken together, this work informs us of the common relationship between mortuary rites and the (re)production of memory within the intimate spheres of everyday life and interpersonal relationships.

Of particular interest to us is the understanding that memorialization is not a single event or a series of practices and rituals. Rather, it is an ongoing process that builds on, yet continually alters, past perceptions. Some of the authors of this volume consider questions of agency and authority in the social process of *personal* memory construction through mortuary rites, reminding us that "neither the production of the self nor the memory is pre-scripted or foreclosed" (Castern 2007: 26), but always in the making. Memorial ceremonies "celebrating" the life of an individual, that is, funerals, the modes of disposing of the deceased's body, the handling of material belongings associated with the departed, a blog, and other digital memorial remains dedicated to the beloved lost through illness (discussed in Kneese's chapter) all contribute to the continued existence of the personhood of the dead, or as Long and Buehring in this volume choose to name it, the "post-death self." Memorialization thus contributes to the agency of the deceased in the private, and sometimes the public, realm, and thus to the transformation of death practices in the twenty-first century.

The significance of memorialization as an approach to dealing with death in some contemporary societies forms the basis for some of the most novel modes of disposal that have arisen, including "green" or tree burials discussed by Boret or the recent technological use of QR codes or steel-cased computer chips embedded in tombstones that enable visitors to learn about the deceased's life, sometimes through his or her own pre-recorded voice (Riechers 2013). By adopting such practices, the "dead-to-be," that is, the living who are facing or planning for their deaths, not only express agency but also acquire cultural authority over the representation of their own death. Through this practice, they attempt to ensure that their memories and their remains will be dealt with according to their own ideas of death and the memory and/or legacy they wish to leave behind. Yet our volume also demonstrates that these efforts remain dependent on the actions of surviving individuals and institutions. The detailed ethnographic accounts of each chapter take us to the heart of the interpersonal processes of decision-making, conflicts, and negotiations that surround death practices. Rather than assume that established structures (including classifications based on ethnicity, religion, social class, and

economic status) elicit particular ideas and behavior, the authors of our chapters reveal the ways that the participation of culturally recognized agents and the negotiation of authority enable people to bypass, adapt, or give new meanings to rituals and ideas of death. Thus death is not always a conservative rite of passage that reinforces the structure and values of the society (Davies 2005). Our chapters show that death rites involve dynamic processes of decision-making, leading to productions and reproductions of innovative, syncretic, or enduring meanings and practices of death. These upcoming mortuary rites might constitute a form of resistance to powerful institutions (religion, state, or otherwise) or/and changes in established ideas of death. Whether public or private, in their relatively constant state of "becoming," death practices may reinforce values and practices long present in a society, but in some situations, what looks "traditional" may be utilized for new purposes, and what looks new may be strategically employed to fortify older ways of life.

Agency, Authority, and the Uses of Tradition

In Part I of this volume, authors explore rites and ideas about death in relation to cultural and religious practices understood as "tradition." These ethnographies come from societies quite different from each other in their level of affluence and degree of commitment to a religious heritage. Bacchiddu works on an island off the coast of Chile, a society relatively isolated from state power and global economics, espousing egalitarian values, and whose dead are feared as having the capacity to sanction inappropriate behavior among the living. If they are cared for properly, the ancestors are benevolent. They are thus seen as retaining agency after death. In death rites, people must negotiate both with the spirits of the dead and with their neighbors and friends in a system of exchanges meant to assure the safety of the survivors and the continuity of their way of life. Bacchiddu does not assume that people blindly follow traditional rites, but rather observes them putting forth great effort to control the intervention of the deceased's spirit by engaging their own agency through their social relationships with the living.

There is also concern about the agency of the "unquiet dead" in rural western Ukraine where Wanner has studied mortuary practices as lived religion in the aftermath of the Second World War and during conditions of state-orchestrated hostility to religious institutions. During that time, local death rituals attempted to ensure the salvation of the soul as the last

act of reciprocal exchange between generations. This was especially important in the context of state-sponsored violence and wartime destruction, which was the source of many "bad deaths," for which the deceased might extract revenge on the living. Proper attention to ritual prescription ensured that the dead would not harm their living kin, remain peaceful, and even serve a protective function over successive generations. In this way, death rituals also served to link the generations to each other and articulate a definition as to who counts as an ancestor and what the obligations of the living are to the dead. However, efforts to deal with the active agency of the dead were complicated by the authority of the Soviet state, which outlawed certain churches and arrested overly visible practitioners. In such a context, mortuary practices rooted in the local "lived religion," in which the dead are active agents, had to be partially improvisational, creative, domesticated, and gendered within the interstices of the authority of the Soviet state over death.

Both Bacchiddu and Wanner describe rural societies where strong ambivalence marks the prevailing attitude of the living toward their dead kin. On the one hand, the dead must be placated and remembered by means of elaborate funeral and memorial rites and periodic prayers and offerings. On the other hand, the living are eager to forget them by avoiding contact with dead bodies, cemeteries, and so forth. Thus by "paying their debts" to the dead, the living keep them at bay, though larger structural forces may impact their ability to do so.

In contrast to both western Ukraine and Apiao, Mathews and Kwong provide a comparative perspective on ideas about death based on ethnographic interviews in three economically affluent societies, the United States, Japan, and China. They argue that religious belief influences not only what people think happens after death, but how a sense of post-death existence, or the denial of it, helps shape their lives in the present. The cultural sources of specific ideas about the afterlife vary across the three countries, including the impact of the Chinese communist government's crackdown on most religion and ancestral ceremonies in a way that parallels the Soviet atheist campaign described by Wanner. The teachings of organized religion are only some of the sources from which individuals draw in constructing their personal ideas about death and about morality, with some rejecting any notion of a supernatural world or life after death.

This is perhaps the greatest marker of how different these societies are (especially China and Japan) from the others discussed in this part of the book. Mathews and Kwong note that a large portion of the population is

not concerned with questions of God or the existence of a world after death. These people are committed to maintaining a moral code for how to live and die as a good person but do not see religion as the only possible source of the moral code to make these judgments. In these societies, individuals are seen as agents in defining their own identities through their beliefs and practices. Selectively chosen religious ideas about death are thus utilized not to maintain continuity with past lifeways, but to further postmodern expectations to express agency and to create one's social identity.

Authority is thus located differently in each of the societies discussed in this part. In Apiao, authority is found in "tradition," and the proper ways to deal with death require individuals to accommodate beliefs in the agency of the dead. The authority for family and neighbors to decide and to act is expressed in their moral behavior and successful negotiations with these agents. In contrast, those in the western Ukraine had to exercise their limited agency within the interstices of the power and authority of the Soviet state and the Russian Orthodox Church, producing new meanings of "traditional" rites and ritual items. In the postindustrial societies of China, Japan, and the United States, rather, the ideology of individual autonomy locates not only agency but also authority. These chapters point to ways "traditional" ideas and practices of death may allow individuals and local communities to craft their own responses to their own mortality and that of others.

Personhood, Memory, and Technology

Part II of this volume asks us to consider not only the ideas but also the material elements of mortuary rituals. The three chapters in this part continue an exploration of disparate cultural settings: the United States, Bebelibe of northwestern Benin, and Acholi in Northern Uganda. They explore the relationship between death and particular technologies: coffins for burial, photographs of the dead, and the digital technologies behind blogs and social networking sites that produce "digital remains." These chapters ask how mortuary technologies relate to notions of personhood, the production of memory, and the authority to define these.

Merz picks up on questions of tradition introduced in Part I, explaining that the "new times" for the Bebelibe are associated with Christianity *and* with material change. Coffin burials are new or "modern," requiring a rectangular grave in contrast to the round burial chambers that

customarily marked "good deaths." Introduced to the region by government and professional workers and other educated groups, who in turn are seen as "modern," many now find it desirable to bury inside coffins despite the cost and what would appear to be a conflict of different understandings of personal identity, death, and reincarnation. For others, however, the customary round grave continues to be important because its construction allows the animating force and identity of the deceased to leave the grave once the body has decomposed in order to be united with a new body. In contrast, it is believed that the closed coffins trap the animating force and identity and impede reincarnation. A Christian understanding of what happens at death, the immediate departure of the animating force and identity (which, in turn, are referred to as the soul/spirit when speaking French) from the body, provides an alternative explanation that eliminates the necessity of the round burial chamber, but one that does not challenge the fundamental belief in reincarnation. Merz argues that new technologies and new interpretations can exist as what she calls embellishments of ideas and rituals rather than as threats to them, allowing for new understandings to develop over time that result in different Bebelibe versions of "new times" and of Christianity.

Merz's concept of "embellishment" is an important one, as it suggests that members of a society undergoing material, social, and ideological change find it easier to accept the transformations in mortuary practices if they see them as elaborations on existing ones rather than radical departures that challenge the authority of "tradition." Conversely, cognizant of a more contemporary anthropological view of culture as a set of loosely shared orientations for communication and mutual understanding rather than a coherent system of symbols and meanings, Merz finds that different members of Bebelibe society, as in all societies, may hold different views on what constitutes proper mortuary rites, and that even a single person may hold contradictory ideas on this subject. Agency and authority thus become more widely distributed with these embellishments while maintaining a facade of "tradition."

New technology allowing photographing the dead and the funeral rites with cameras and cell phones is also a way of maintaining close ties with the past. In Acholi, where the violence of the 1970s–2000s has created tremendous social disruption, Seebach finds three reasons for taking death photographs. One of these reasons is to keep the deceased's personhood alive for the children who may not know or remember the dead and for the mourners to keep something of the person nearby despite his or her

corporeal absence. The photos allow these children some degree of agency to remember the deceased and the funeral despite their youth or absence. The elders use these photographs to create a collective memory, one that reinforces their authority and the authority of the "Acholi way," that is, the "correct" way. At the same time, the photographs themselves have social lives, a sort of agency derived from the deceased and the authority of those who control the images to impact the social lives of those who interact with these images.

Exploring the maintenance of blogs and social networking of the terminally ill and their digital remains after death, Kneese argues that although we often imagine the virtual world as immaterial, disembodied, and autonomous, in reality, it depends on the material world of technology, money, and labor. These virtual sites of memorialization result from the authority of the company, which enables the communication among the various agents: the dying person, family members and friends, and unrelated visitors. The algorithms of digital platforms structure interactions, sometimes sending unsolicited reminders to follow the deceased on Twitter. Go Daddy, a large private Internet domain registrar, demands payment to maintain the domain name of a blog. Although assisting with posts to the dying person's blog or social networking site, or maintaining them after the person's death may be a source of support and an expression of love, these are forms of affective labor nonetheless, done as Kneese notes, along with changing colostomy bags and planning memorial rites. However, the contributions of many, including those who are initially strangers, democratically assist in the creation of the person's digital memory and provide a new twenty-first-century medium for communicating with the dead. They also create new arenas for contestations about control over the deceased's "digital remains," based on new structures of authority enabled by the new technology.

All three chapters in Part II shed light on the way memory, memorialization, and personhood are defined, mediated, and continued after death. As Kneese points out, anthropologists and sociologists have long recognized that personhood is "networked," in the sense that interactions with others are needed to define, create, establish, and reinforce a social self. That process continues beyond death as others, with varying degrees of knowledge and authority, contribute to the collective memory of the person, the way in which the deceased continues to exist among the living. In Bebelibe society, the individual is composed of three elements: the physical form, the animating force, and the identity.

The animating force and identity elements, that is, what makes the person alive and unique, are linked together and so jointly reincarnate into a union with a new body. It is the job of the survivors to make sure, through ritual and the construction of an adequate grave, that such a new union can happen, thus contributing to the person's continued existence. In contrast to pre-Christian thought where separation only occurs after the body has decomposed, the "new times" and Christianity have introduced the notion that the animating force and identity are a person's soul and spirit, which leave the body immediately at death. This results in decreased concern about the type of grave or the timely performance of ritual, creating greater focus on the festive aspects of family reunion during *dihuude* celebrations that follow well after death and burial.

In Acholi, people articulate that the photographs are taken to maintain the personhood of the deceased, to allow those too young to remember to know their close relative, and to allow those who cannot attend the funeral to experience the person at his or her death. The photographs provide a concrete object of remembrance and a material connection with the deceased. As Seebach points out, in a region ravaged by violence, where many of the dead have no marked burial places, their photographs serve as surrogate or proxy graves. They are the only material objects the survivors can keep, not only to remember their loved ones, but also to cope with their grief. Furthermore, the elders are aware that these objects have the power to help them construct a collective memory by documenting for the younger generations how things have been done the "Acholi way" or how things *should* be done despite years of social change, war, and destruction of communities. Whoever controls the photographs in a sense controls the memory of the person, of the family story, and of a former way of life. Kan (2015: 293–319) provides an example of the way that photography has come to challenge the authority of the clan leaders' and elders' control of death rituals. He reports that picture-taking of Tlingit memorial potlatches has become so invasive and distracting that chiefs and elders now tell participants to refrain from video recording and photographing during what should be the most solemn and emotional portion of the ritual.

The technology differs, but there are parallels in Americans' use of digitized data. Although among a wider network than kin, friends, and neighbors, the personhood of someone who has died is discussed and remembered, creating a post-death person. But how that story is told, recorded, and saved for future readers is as complex as the webs of social

relationships and the technologies of American society more generally. There is tension between democratic participation in creating a collective memory, the companies that house the digital posts, and the family of the deceased. Moreover, in the less personal and partially anonymous virtual world of the postindustrial North, there is always a possibility that voyeuristic strangers, "death tourists," or people falsely claiming a close relationship to the deceased will participate in this process. Despite the wide dispersal of authority in North America to define and remember the dead, those with no ties to the deceased do not share in that cultural legitimacy.

We need to remember when thinking about the material underpinnings of personhood and memory that the use of various technologies comes with real monetary costs. In a powerful critique of the American funeral industry, Mitford (1998) accused funeral directors and others involved in pushing high-cost funeral items such as fancy caskets on vulnerable, grieving families. However, anthropologists working in numerous settings have noted that vast resources for funerals are commonly expended as survivors' attempts to show respect for the dead and to make a claim for the family's moral legitimacy or/and social status (see Huntington and Metcalf 1991; Robben 2004; and Bacchiddu and Seebach in this volume). Likewise, the chapters in this part all note that expenses of defining and maintaining a person's memory (or in some cases a memory of an entire way of life represented by that person's funeral) may involve new costs as well as new technologies to mark desired social status through purchasing symbolic goods, hiring professional photographers, buying a casket, or maintaining a digital archive. The financial cost of doing so may be significant for family members, so that they take on debt or postpone other expensive rituals to express the moral legitimacy of their decisions to perform particular rites or remember in particular ways.

Individual, Choice, and Identity

Part III of the book takes up the topics of agency and authority (raised by Kneese) in decisions about mortuary practices in affluent postindustrial societies. In particular, they ask who makes decisions about whether the funeral and burial practices should be the standard ones of the past or newer alternatives that can be more personal and individualized. Recent theorists have suggested that in modern times agency is no longer a choice but, like individualization, an obligation. In their essay "Death of One's Own,

Life of One's," German sociologists Beck and Beck-Gernsheim explain that contemporary "people are forced to conceive of themselves as do-it-yourself producers of meaning and biography, to play a part in shaping both their own lives and the life of society" (2001: 151). Included in this requirement is the continuity of the production of that meaning and biography through their own death. It will therefore come to no surprise that, as Lash puts it in his foreword to Beck, "individualization is a fate, not a choice; in the land of individual freedom of choice, the option to escape individualization and to refuse participation in the individualizing game is empathetically not on the agenda" (Lash 2001: xvi).

The chapters in this part find that in much of contemporary Japan and the United States, what outlives the person is not a restless spirit or merely material objects such as pictures. What seems most significant to many people in these societies, what remains most important, is his or her memory. This memory is not merely an *ad hoc* collection of individually recollected anecdotes, but constitutes a representation of his or her social identity based on the way the person lived, on the type of ritual and disposal of remains he or she voiced as desirable, and on the selective interpretations and stories that are exchanged among the living.

Boret explores these questions through his research on a type of burial relatively new to Japan called "tree burial." Rather than having the deceased's ashes added to those of the ancestors in a family tomb, some people choose to have a tree as their own grave marker. Anthropologists have pointed to the shaping of such alternatives by demographic realities, such as not having an heir to take on the responsibilities of maintaining a family grave (Rowe 2003; Kawano 2010; Boret 2014; Danely 2014). In this chapter, Boret shows that this decision also reflects the identities and relationships of the individuals who make such a choice while alive in order to create a legacy for the survivors and a memory that will reflect who they were. The problem here may be that the authority and agency of family members to perform the customary rituals do not align. Rather than considering this as an example of the individualization of mortuary ritual, it should be seen as a way of negotiating how one will be remembered, perhaps as a happily married couple of a nuclear family or as a woman in an unhappy marriage who rebels against burial in her husband's family's grave. He also suggests that tree burial is a means of (re)gaining control over the representation of one's death, which has been controlled and standardized by the funeral industry. But this (re)appropriation is not without some limits. The individual has agency to make choices about

what should be done with his or her body. Nonetheless, that agency is constrained by requirements that she or he do so, the expectations of new social ideologies to accept or renounce "traditional" burial practices, and to create a personal identity by which to be remembered. Not to choose is to risk not being considered a full social being (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). To choose, this part of the book argues, is to contribute to change in the broader understanding of death in Japan.

Long and Buehring ask how that process of decision-making might occur. What constitutes a "traditional American funeral" has changed over time; options for mortuary ritual have expanded through a history of immigration, industrialization, and ideological change. Exploring the perceptions and experiences of American couples who come from different religious backgrounds sheds light on the processes of interpersonal negotiation and the attribution of meaning to various mortuary options. They find that individual religious (or secular) identity, together with marital negotiations over the course of the couple's relationship, influences, but does not determine, how things will be done when a person dies. The key value voiced was that of respect, respect for the dead and respect for the individual, which is an acknowledgment of the authority of the individual to make decisions. The deceased's memory, or "post-death self" (Long and Buehring 2014) to the extent that it remains a presence in society, may reflect the agency of the person to set the tone while alive, but is dependent on others who have the authority to actualize, correct, and embellish, regardless of whether the funeral and burial are "traditional" or "alternative." The authority of the living participants is based on the moral claim of respect for the deceased, even when making choices that the individual may not have voiced. They moreover suggest that in what we, following Victor Turner, might call the liminoid experience of ritual, in the communal taking apart of the pieces of mortuary ritual and creatively putting them back together, these intermarried families provide alternative models of practice that contribute to the Levi-Straussian bricolage contemporary U.S. mortuary practice.

Looking Ahead at the Anthropological Study of Death

The chapters in this book provide not only rich ethnographic case studies, but also bring our attention to significant questions of agency and authority embedded in the production of mortuary rites and the sociocultural process of memorialization. They collectively contribute to a more

sophisticated understanding of the relationship between experiences of continuity and change within local ideas and practices of death. How do new concepts and technologies impact understandings of agency, and who has the moral, political, and economic authority to perform and interpret mortuary rituals? Ideas about the agency of the deceased are responsive to social change. In the rural societies discussed by Bacchiddu and Wanner, the dead ancestors unmistakably have agency since they are believed to be capable of harming their living kin if the latter neglect them (see Straight 2006). Alternative beliefs and practices that emphasize the continuity of identity through memory rather than the physical body are garnering increased interest in Northern Europe, the United Kingdom, and Japan, leading to a decline in the sociocultural centrality of physical remains in mortuary rituals involving the physical remains. Even in these societies, notions of the agency of the dead remain. Thus one of Kneese's respondents spoke of an uncanny feeling, comparable to seeing a ghost or interacting with a spirit, upon encountering his late girlfriend's pictures on her Facebook page. Photographs, trees, or Facebook pages create and symbolize the spiritual essences of the dead and their social agency that their loved ones have a need to preserve.

New ideas and practices of death do not enter society as replacements to be accepted or rejected, but provide new options in a broader field of possibilities for agency and negotiation. They may serve as "embellishments," such as the introduction of coffins in Bebelibe towns and villages (Merz in this volume), or turn formerly and relatively insignificant ritual items into potent symbols of modern nationalism as with the hand-embroidered towels used in western Ukrainian mortuary rites (Wanner in this volume). Change may loosen the authority of specialists, as has occurred in affluent societies like Japan or the United States (Mathews and Kwong, Kneese, Boret, Long and Buehring in this volume) as people combine elements of different practices, for example, a conservative church funeral, a green burial, and a digital cemetery. But new ideologies and technologies can also be used to reinforce claims to authority as among Acholi elders (Seebach in this volume), or may replace one powerful central agent with an even more powerful one, for example, the control by the Soviet state over the Greek Orthodox Church in western Ukraine.

As important as these new technologies and ideas are for an understanding of sociocultural change in death practices, the anthropology of death would also do well to consider more explicitly the role of human emotion. Although the experience of dying or of the death of another

would seem to be fertile ground to explore the intersection of emotion and meaning, there seems to be little work to date that goes beyond personal reflection on deaths during fieldwork (Rosaldo 1993; Kan 1989/2015; Kaufman and Morgan 2005). Beatty (2014) lays out an anthropological approach to emotion that is narrative driven and ethnographically rich, an approach that goes beyond the irresolvable debate as to whether emotion is cognitive and culturally specific or whether it is biological and universal to emphasize the time-depth and biographical elements that shape emotion. Some of the ethnographies in this volume hint at what is possible in ethnographic elicitation of narratives of death, most notably in Bacchiddu's description of the anger and guilt of the man in Apiao who had to kill his dog to maintain community solidarity in the wake of the dog's "misbehavior." Our volume suggests other avenues to exploring emotion and death in anthropology in the future: the relationship between authority and emotional labor (Kneese in this volume); the ways that technology may help mourners cope with violent and distant deaths in the creation of memory (Seebach in this volume); and the potential impact of emotional responses to innovation in death rituals where authority is widely dispersed (Long and Buehring in this volume).

In their creative constructions of new ritual forms and interpretations of death, twenty-first-century men and women facing their own death or the passing of their loved ones continue to draw on various cultural traditions, domestic and foreign, religious and secular, while also trying to make sure that the funerals they construct are meaningful to those they care about. The circle of these loved ones appears in one sense to be getting smaller with changes in migration, technology, and ideologies that emphasize individualism. The nuclear family or even smaller units and more temporary relationships are replacing the earlier corporate social units, such as clans, lineages, village communities, and so forth in the execution of mortuary ritual. Participation from a distance and even from strangers, which contemporary technology from photographs in Acholi to blogging in North America enables, can also expand the network of those who contribute to the diverse new forms, meanings, and memories that are created. In determining ritual form or defining the person of the deceased, the widely dispersed authority of acquaintances who speak at a memorial service may be weaker than the authority of a clan elder. Yet either reflects the nature of social relationships in the society in which they live, and both types of authority contribute to the creation of the post-death self, the memory of the deceased, and his or her perceived agency among the living.