

Centre for
Death & Society
(CDAS)



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

Centre for Death & Society

September 2021 Newsletter

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Director's Note

Greetings to all our CDAS newsletter readers and we hope this latest edition finds you keeping well after our brief UK summer hiatus!

We have a bumper newsletter this month and we're starting it with the exciting announcement that Dr Kate Woodthorpe is stepping up into the role of Co-Director of CDAS. Kate has been a core member of the Centre since 2010 and has been heavily involved in all teaching, research, public engagement and PhD supervision activities, so she's very familiar with CDAS's purpose and mission. Kate has extensive experience of working with academics, third sector and commercial stakeholders and advising UK Government on death related policy, and has published over 60 academic articles, book chapters and books on death, dying and bereavement. She is also particularly keen on supporting colleagues and mentoring, and has recently published a survival guide for early career academics called '[Survive and Thrive in Academia](#)' (2018). Find out more about Kate and her work [here](#). For those that don't know her she's written a short intro below.

Enjoy the newsletter and, as always, keep us posted of any events or activities that we can help share. Over a 1000 people receive this newsletter and more requests to subscribe come in every month – we're so pleased that you enjoy reading it.

John and Kate



Figure 1: CDAS Members at a recent meeting

Introducing Kate

k.v.woodthorpe@bath.ac.uk

Hello everyone, I'm delighted to be stepping up as Co- Director of CDAS and helping the centre develop as it moves towards its third decade. Having been at the University of Bath for 12 years and for the last two years acting as CDAS Deputy Director, this is an exciting opportunity to build on the excellent work of Glenys Howarth, Allan Kellehear, Tony Walter and John Troyer in taking the centre forward into its next phase. CDAS means a lot to me professionally as my intellectual home, and I will do my best to ensure the centre continues to thrive as the world emerges from the pandemic and we start to address the seismic and often overlooked social issues associated with death, dying, bereavement and body disposal.

John and I will be co-directing the centre for the forthcoming academic year and I am brimming with ideas about how CDAS can evolve, so watch this space! For now, a key priority for me is to listen and learn from our brilliant CDAS community about your work, your regard for the centre and what the centre can do for you. There is enormous potential for CDAS moving forward, and your input is critical in ensuring that the centre's work reflects and supports the community it serves. Expect communications from me asking for your thoughts imminently.

I feel very honoured to be taking on this role for a research centre that I know means so much to our community around the world, as a hub that brings like-minded people together. Please drop me an email if you want to share your thoughts on what the centre does well and where it could develop, I'm open to all ideas and suggestions. Otherwise, I'll be in touch soon to seek your views. I look forward to hearing them.



Introductions

Placement Students for the SPS Research Office

This year the SPS Research Office is housing two placement students for the full academic year. These students, although mainly working with the main centres (CDAS, CDS, CASP), are available to help anyone in the department with research work.

Ben Davis:

Ben is a placement/third year Social Sciences BSc student. Ben has a background in performing arts and so has experience in areas like presenting. Ben is excited to get involved in all projects however he has a passion for Qualitative research. His areas of interest include:

Reducing disability inequality in the UK/US: particularly interested in peoples experiences and how we can use that to shape accessibility policy; such as the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Rights of people with disabilities in the UK; along with why there is such a lack of political will to change.

Health inequality across the world: Particularly looking at how governments can reduce the levels of inequality and looking at most effective healthcare systems; interest in intersectionality and the effect that several labels has on citizens access to healthcare.

How social change happens from the grassroots: The impact of the arts, how public opinion changes, why it changes, how can we create the environment where social change is possible.



Agneus Nancy Stanly:

Nancy is a 3rd year Sociology student on a 4-year sandwich course. Nancy is bilingual, speaking French and English fluently, and can speak Spanish at the B2 (basic fluency) level as well as Japanese at the A1 (beginner) level. Nancy's research interests include:

Sociology of the Internet (and new media); specifically, how a social dissociation has been created between the 'real world' and 'the internet' and how such dissociation has affected generation Z- as well as newly generation alpha- and what that indicates for future socialization (both primary and secondary).

Social Anthropology in Asia; specifically looking at how and why phenomena such as *karōshi*, lonely deaths, dying populations, and far-right nationalism are on the rise.

Race, Colonialism, and De-colonization in the age of the Internet; specifically looking at how racism, white supremacy, and colonialism haven't diminished but simply evolved-evident in social media algorithms, trend and beauty cycles (popularized through the internet and new media) based off ethnic and cultural appropriation, photo and video filters upholding Eurocentric beauty standards, etc.



Recent Publications

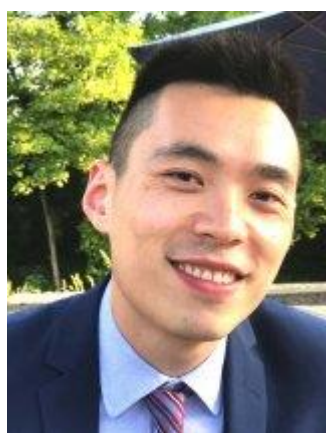
[A gradual separation from the world: A qualitative exploration of existential loneliness in old age. Ageing and Society, 1-21.](#)

Carr, Sam & Fang, Chao.

In this study, Carr, Sam, & Fang explore experiences of existential loneliness (EL) in 80 older people living in retirement communities across the United Kingdom and Australia. Utilizing qualitative semi-structured interviews, Carr, Sam, & Fang were able to gain an in-depth exploration of issues such as biographical narrative, close relationships, loss, feelings of loneliness and retirement living.

Other News

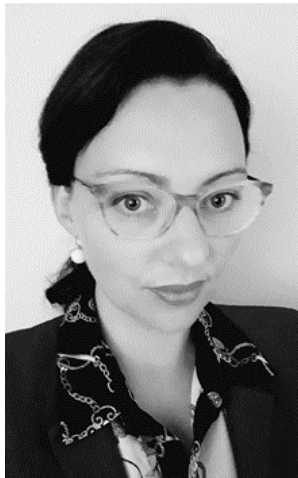
Introducing Visiting Research Fellows



[Dr Chao Fang](#), a CDAS visiting research fellow, has started his [new research role](#) in the Institute of Education at the University College London (UCL). Chao has previously conducted his PhD at CDAS and worked as a research associate for a CDAS project on older people's loneliness. Building upon this experience, Chao accepted a research fellow position at UCL this August to conduct a longitudinal qualitative research project on long-Covid. Being part of the 9 million NHIR-UKRI funded [Convalescence Long-COVID Study](#), Chao will work with researchers from the University of York and many other institutions to conduct approximately 300 interviews with long Covid patients, their close others and healthcare professionals across three waves of interviews between 2021 and 2023 (100 interviews per wave). Chao will play a significant role in this exciting project, exploring long Covid not only as an array of physio-cognitive symptoms but also as an emotionally laden and socially meaningful experience. The research findings will be used to inform and improve support and care in social and health care settings to better accommodate long Covid patients' multifaceted needs in their ongoing lives.

While working on the long Covid project, Chao will be actively involved in varied research and public engagement activities at CDAS. Chao will continue his work alongside CDAS director Dr John Troyer and other centre colleagues to reinforce collaborations with research institutions in China, Japan and other neighbouring countries and regions, further developing [a trans-national research network on ageing, end of life care and social policy](#) in the Pacific

Dr. Jana Králová is Lecturer in Social Work in Edinburgh Napier University, an invited member of an organising committee of Challenging Research Group (Birkbeck University of London), Fellow of Higher Education Academy, interdisciplinary theorist and CDAS PhD



graduate. Jana's 15 years research into Social Death and its prevention includes all individuals and communities that are dehumanised, marginalised, discriminated against, oppressed, excluded, stigmatised, and otherwise considered worthless by others. Jana's interdisciplinary research exposes the conceptual inadequacies of human rights and social policy and their real-world consequences. To mitigate these, Jana has developed theoretical framework which enables conceptual 'inclusion by default' of those otherwise omitted by theoretical frames of human rights and social policy. Jana has presented the results of her research at the British Sociological Association Annual Conference: *Challenging Social Hierarchies and Inequalities* at Glasgow Caledonian University

(24th– 26th April 2019). The paper's title is 'Rethinking Human Rights: *humane*, you what?'. Her latest contribution challenges the OECD's conceptualisation of avoidable mortality:

Králová, J., (2021) 'Social Death in 2020: Covid-19, which lives matter, which deaths count?' in Pentaris P. (Ed.) *Death, Grief and Loss in the Context of Covid-19*, Abingdon:

Routledge, pp. 77-98. Earlier, Jana co-edited a special issue on social death: Králová, J., and Walter, T. ed., 2015. Themed Issue: Social Death. *Contemporary Social Science*. Abingdon: Routledge, 10 (3), pp. 235-335. Jana is also a sole author of its opening article 'What is social death?'.

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Past Events

Insights from the death, funerary practices, and cemeteries

- This is part one of a three-part serialized writeup on the Casnewydd (Newport) Event held on (28/07/21 & 11/08/21) by George Gumisiriza and Sam Hooker, PhD Students. Stay tuned to the next two newsletters for more!

There are a few comments and questions that we found fascinating in the conversation with the participants at the event. For example, "What kind of jobs will you do after your course? What do you call yourselves?" This was food for thought for both Sam and George. Also, "It is the first of its kind in Newport. It is not a British thing to talk about death. We tuck-in our emotions." This comment sounded over generalised; however, the participants had some lived experiences to justify the suggestion. And "anything to do with talking about death should be promoted." This seemed to concur with the whole aim of the event.

At the end of the two sessions, two things were clear: a) People are not scared to talk about death. However, someone will wait for another person to start the conversation, and cautiously but surely, others can join in. b) During the conversation, the first-person pronoun

singular “I” or plural “We,” when thinking or talking about one’s own death is more like to be avoided. People would rather talk about another’s person’s death. Involved oneself in the conversation about death carries social and cultural perspectives that draw on or feed into the death taboo contested narrative. Tony Walter would agree that death is “not forbidden, but hidden” (Walter, 1993, p.37-38).

The participants came from diverse social and cultural background, which presented wide experiences in the discussion. As early careers researcher into death scholarship, we held some assumptions that Covid-19 may have enabled people to think about death and also talk more about it in day-to day conversation. We contemplated on how the conversation on death might enhance social cohesion and emotional well-being.

The event centred the conversation on three aspects: The “bizarre” death and funeral of the British novelist and poet Thomas Hardy which occurred in 1928; comparing Afrocentric perspectives on death with Welsh death and funerary practices from the 19th Century – the 21st century; and to reflect on how deaths capes involving British cemeteries are utilised for multi-dimensional activities for the well-being of local communities. We developed resources involving pictures and handouts for each session

CDAS COMMUNITY NEWS

Recent Publications

[More than you were: writing my father’s life, death and addiction](#)


This article by **Christina Thatcher** and published in the *Journal of Poetry Therapy* explores what it was like for the poet to write a poetry collection about their father's fatal drug overdose.

Other News

ASDS Online Seminars

[The Association for the Study of Death and Society](#)

The first series of ASDS online seminars has now finished. If you were not able to attend the events, or would like to watch them all again, you can find all recordings on Figshare.



Online courses available from the Glasgow End of Life Studies Group

Fall recruitment has opened for the fully online programme of [postgraduate study](#) in End of Life Studies. There are 3 intakes in total throughout the year (in April and September). Learners can work towards a postgraduate certificate, diploma or MSc, and can be based anywhere in the world as it's fully online.

The fifth run of the free MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) is starting July 12th. It's called [End of Life Care: Challenges and Innovations](#). They currently have learners from 60 countries and the course has been rated as one of the top 100 MOOCs by Class Central. This MOOC runs approximately three times a year.

Death Studies Podcast

The Death Studies Podcast is a new monthly podcast hosted by CDAS Visiting Early Career Scholar Bethan Michael-Fox and CDAS alumni Renske Visser. It is a platform for the diversity of voices in, around and contributing to the academic field of Death Studies. The first episode is now live and features Dr Erica Borgstrom!

The podcast features emerging as well as established researchers, independent scholars and practitioners sharing their ideas, research and experience. Contributions from all disciplines, from different countries, cultures and contexts, as well as from diverse and diverging perspectives, are all welcome. As theories and ideas around death and dying are always changing, this podcast aims to serve as a starting point to ongoing dialogue between the range of people involved in researching dying, death and the dead.

You can find out more at www.thedeathstudiespodcast.com and follow us on Twitter, @thedeathpodcast, and Facebook or Insta @TheDeathStudiesPodcast. You can listen here or (almost) anywhere you find your podcasts (we are still pending approval for Google podcasts): <https://anchor.fm/thedeathstudiespodcast/>.

If you have any queries you can contact us at thedeathstudiespodcast@gmail.com



EVENTS

Suicide Bereavement's 10th International Conference- Thursday 23rd September 2021

The conference will combine research, lived experience, the arts, and practice to discuss and challenge the misconception that men don't talk. Not only will men bereaved by suicide talk at the conference, but there will also be 5 men from Northern Ireland ambulance service present to express their emotions by singing in their band. In fact, they are releasing a single at the conference and all money raised from the sales will be given to the NHS.

There will also be a workshop hosted by Jenny Berry in which she will highlight how she engages with vulnerable high-risk groups, such as prisoners, helping them to express themselves, through poetry and writing songs.

Additionally, Owen Patterson (MP & Vice Chair of the *All Parliamentary Group on Suicide & Self Harm Prevention*) will be speaking at the conference. Sadly, like many of us, Owen has been personally bereaved by suicide.

Whilst the conference will take place face-to-face, with over 300 people already registered to attend, a live stream version is available.

So..... if you want to be challenged, inspired, and be reminded why you chose to work in this field. This conference is for you!

For more information:

[3649 SBUK Conference 2021 flyer online v7.pdf \(suicidebereavementuk.com\)](#)

To register to attend either face-to-face or via livestream:

[Suicide Bereavement UK FACE 2 FACE Conference - Suicide Bereavement UK](#)

Supporting bereaved older people - free webinars from Cruse

As part of the 'Bereavement Supporter'* project Cruse Bereavement Care are providing 2 free webinars. Older people experience loss and bereavement as a more frequent occurrence, often at a time when they have fewer support networks and are therefore disproportionately affected by grief. These webinars may be of interest if you would like to know more about how bereaved people can be supported by their community, or you work with bereaved people, older people or in the housing support sector.

Webinar 1:

Thursday 7th October, 10.00am – 11.15am – with guest speaker Professor Karen West, University of Bristol

This webinar will focus on the evaluation findings, from the project's peer support approach. The evaluation is based on data collected from ExtraCare residents, staff and Bereavement Supporter volunteers and diaries kept during the pandemic.

To book:

[Meeting Registration - Zoom](#)

Webinar 2:

Thursday 14th October, 10.00am – 11.15am – with guest speaker Dr. Amanda Roberts, Irish Hospice Foundation

This webinar will focus on how a community-based approach can effectively support bereaved people, underpinned by the principles in the Adult Bereavement Care pyramid.

Hear more about how peer support within the Bereavement Supporter project has helped bereaved people get the right help at the right time.

To book:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJItcuCvqjwpHNS9dYe0DV9JD7drSCf2FAPe>

Immigration Law and Policy, Border Control and Migrant Deaths

- *September 30th and October 1st.* Day 2 will be of particular interest to death studies colleagues.

This two-day online conference will explore the relationship between migration and border control law and policy, and migrant deaths within and close to the borders of Europe, as well as relevant practice and research in the area of contentious death investigation.

Conference papers will address a diverse range of relevant topics, such as the implementation of the UN Global Compacts for migration and on refugees during the pandemic, immigration detention, pushbacks, the externalisation of border controls, migrant and refugee vulnerability, the treatment of migrants with disabilities and State responsibility for deaths.

Contentious Death Research- Friday 1st October from 8.30am GMT:

Panel I – Contentious Death Research

Chair: Dr. Sam McIntosh

Causes and effects of contested deaths: Coronial justice in the digital age

Associate Professor Rebecca Scott Bray (The University of Sydney)

Accountability in the aftermath of police related deaths in the US and England and Wales: Processes and outcomes

Dr. David Baker (The University of Liverpool)

The role of family in death investigations: Examining policy and practice in England and Wales

Professor Jessica Jacobson (Birkbeck, University of London), Dr Hannah Rumble and Lorna Templeton (University of Bath)

To register (registration is necessary!):

events.gbz@hu-berlin.de


CALLS FOR PAPERS

Afterlives of Data - Media-N, Fri 1st Oct 2021

Call for Abstracts:

The editorial board of *Media-N* invites abstracts for articles, artist's projects, interviews, and reviews, for a special issue on the afterlives of data. We invite work that explores the increasingly blurred line between the biological body and the data body, and how we attend to the "afterlives" of data: how can we trace the materialization, circulation, preservation, and transformation of data across the thresholds of biological death, format obsolescence, as well as its movement from physical embodiment to digitization. The concept of the "afterlife of data" thus names not only the uses of our data bodies (even after our biological lives have ended), but also the material fate of data that enters into one of many kinds of afterlife, from being left to rot in an e-waste dump, to being preserved in refrigerated data centers and vaults, or literally being sent into the heavens. *Media-N* seeks submissions engaging how the topic intersects with digital art, media, and culture, though submissions with interdisciplinary approaches will be considered.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- e-waste and the material afterlife of data
 - afterlives of digital selves, online identities, personal data and biometric information
 - DNA data storage, metabolomic storage, and other formats that merge the digital and biological
- 

- uploading consciousness, neural nets, AI and cyborgian immortality
- cryopreservation, the politics of genomic research
- history of holograms, holographic memorials/reanimations of dead celebrities (i.e. 2pac, Ol' Dirty Bastard, Maria Callas, Whitney Houston, Robert Kardashian), virtual reincarnations
- NFTs, blockchain and environmental impact, aura and digital art
- biotechnology and biofabrication
- data decay and data preservation (time capsules, bunkers, data deposited/stored in space, etc).
- archival digitization (eg. afterlife of slavery in terms of its data), the digitization of analog archives and the resultant mining made possible
- prehistories of writing data on and in the body (eg., tattooing prisoners, branding and notching and cropping the bodies of the enslaved), fantasies of permanent data preservation, living repositories for data
- AI and the encoded afterlife of bias (eg. image training sets that revive outmoded taxonomies of difference)

Submission (*October 1, 2021*: Deadline for submission of abstracts):

To submit an abstract for consideration, please send 200-300 word abstracts and a condensed CV to:

- Guest editor Brian Michael Murphy: brianmichaelmurphy@gmail.com
- Guest editor Kris Paulsen: paulsen.20@osu.edu
- Executive editor Johanna Gosse: johannagosse@gmail.com

For more information,

visit: <https://iopn.library.illinois.edu/journals/median/information/authors>

<https://www.newmediacaucus.org/cfp-for-media-n-special-themed-issue-afterlives-of-data/>

Media-N: Journal of the New Media Caucus is a peer-reviewed, open-access journal (ISSN1942-017X) dedicated to scholarly research and critical dialogue on new media art, publishing scholarly articles, critical essays, artists' projects and reviews.

Social Aspects of Death, Dying and Bereavement Study Group Virtual Symposium - Death and Sociology, Thu 2nd Dec 2021

Call for Abstracts:

The academic study of death, dying and bereavement has become typically associated with disciplines beyond sociology, such as medicine, psychology and psychiatry. Consequently, knowledge about death, dying and bereavement has often focused more on individuals, symptoms or treatments, and less on a holistic lived experience, the social contexts in which life is lived, and the context(s) in which loss occurs. Yet there is much to be gained from developing a more contextual understanding of DDB. For example, the prevailing assumption that grief is a negative emotion to be addressed can overlook the potential value of this emotion and how death can also mean liberation, economic change and (possibly welcomed) relational shifts. What is more, over the past year with Covid-19 we have been reminded of the limitations of individualistic discourses on death and witnessed the value and meaning of shared experiences of funeral rites and bereavement.

In celebration of the study group entering its third decade, in this year's annual symposium we aim to revisit the group's origins with a focus on what sociology can uniquely offer the study of death, dying and bereavement. In this one-day online symposium, we invite researchers and practitioners to submit abstracts on this theme. We are particularly interested in exploring how the application of a sociological way of thinking about death, dying and bereavement can allow for a broader and much richer awareness of the way in which the end of life, and what happens afterwards, is experienced.

Topics can include, but are not limited to:

- Application of sociological theory to contemporary and historical death, dying and bereavement
- Use of sociological research methods
- Sociology in professional practice

Submission

Please submit abstracts of up to 250 words by Midnight (GMT) on Monday 20th September 2021 to BSADDB@gmail.com. Presentations will be 20 minutes long with additional time for questions.

The symposium will be held virtually on Thursday 2nd December 2021. An online access link will be sent via email to all registered attendees.

More details about the study group can be found [here](#).

For more information or informal discussion about the theme of the symposium, contact BSADDB@gmail.com.

Cultures of Lament, Exile, and Oblivion: A Symposium - Fri 28th Jan 2022

Call for Papers - Deadline 26th Nov 2021

The Fellows of St John's College, Durham University, in collaboration with the Department of Theology and Religion, warmly invite your interest in this one-day symposium on Cultures of Lament, Exile, and Oblivion. While papers on each theme in relation to specific data, texts, or research questions will structure our proceedings, the Symposium Committee particularly encourages proposals on the nuances and opportunities of their thematic relationship by teasing out expressions of their mutual configuration in the complexity of human lives.

What might lament, exile, or oblivion – and their venerable histories of experience – convey to us today? What are their hermeneutical and ethical implications for our grasp of the human condition? These great themes of existence lie at the heart of our Call for Research and how, across diverse cultures and eras, they are experimentally pursued in the rhyme and reason of ritual-symbolism, narrative, myth, art and architecture, and the dramatic textures of politics and poetry, faith, music, identity, and ethics not least. Why, then, do some human cultures, religious or otherwise, persist in depictions of a world of ultimate oblivion for its mortal inhabitants? What might this declare about our epistemologies, our cultural classifications, our emotional or psychological adjudications of the world into which we are thrown? How might oblivion illuminate discussions in our contemporary age, so often diagnosed with social fracture, amnesia, and malaise, and spring forth the hope of their opposite in belonging, memory, and rootedness?

What kind of truth might exile speak to the human condition at large as well as to the displaced of our own day, the marginalised, those in flight from their homeland? And how or why do these experiences often issue in songs of lament, in ritual weeping, in social action and petition, and in philosophic schemes that bid to reveal or conceal the depth of our vulnerable exposure? In short, how have these brute facts of mortal life aided the pinch or push of intellectual, artistic, architectural, and musical creativity? Wherein lies the longevity of these forms in communicating what so often seems to trouble our words in the throes of lament, exile, or oblivion?

It is, therefore, of particular interest to the Symposium Committee to invite ongoing comment on the definitional and experiential variance of these vast force-fields of thought and practice through a series of worked examples, historical or ethnographic cases, thematic experimentations, or first-hand accounts of personal or professional experience. For they, too, constitute arenas of play and improvisation, challenge, pain, and exhortation – all as part of the ongoing creative challenge of humanity's self-knowing.

Themes of Interest

We welcome creative interpretations of the following topics in relation to our principal themes (N.B. this is not an exclusive or comprehensive list):

- Identity and/or narratives of belonging and resistance
- Worldviews
- Memory and/or loss
- Tragedy and trauma and/or healing
- Protest and/or prophecy

- Expression/catharsis in literary, artistic, or musical form
- Environmentalism
- Sectarianism
- Ritual-Symbolism
- Diaspora, migration, refugee crisis
- Force
- Therapy and clinical approaches/experiences
- Theories of knowledge
- Escapism
- Desire
- Language, crisis, paradox; meaning making/breaking
- Technology, consumerism, and the periodization of being
- Existential angst/fear, philosophies of extinction
- War and peace; terror and offensive death
- The attention economy
- Qualities of relation, perception, and action
- Networked identities and the opacity of the self
- Mythic genesis and/or rupture
- Traditional-Secular spiritualities
- Scriptural and theological approaches
- Pastoral contexts
- Embodiment and/or emotion
- Time, temporality, tenses, and tonalities
- Altered states of consciousness
- Theories of culture and the human person
- Ethics, pain, suffering; theodicy and threnody
- Death, mortality, and grief
- Tangibility and material culture

We strongly welcome presentations across a range of textual, historical, philosophical, musical, literary, artistic, and social-scientific disciplines as well as experience-led practitioners in the therapeutic and clinical sciences. Cultures of Lament, Exile, and Oblivion is, then, open for presentations seeking to pinpoint one of our themes in particular (perhaps drawing on specific research data or work-in-progress) or to explore their interplay in any number of experimental combinations and directions. The style and format of delivery for those exhibiting musical or artistic creations is flexible. We are very interested in these kinds of ‘interactive’ proposals, but we stress that consideration should be given to online logistics: a brief statement of intent in your proposals will suffice.

Conference Format

The symposium will be conducted online. We do not wish to exclude scholars and practitioners in the UK or abroad who may not be able to travel due to varying Covid-19 restrictions across the world. We welcome contributions from academic and service-practitioners at any career stage. The hope, then, is that (a) such arrangements might encourage a greater diversity of participation across cultural borders, enriching the conference’s measure of the themes at hand; and that (b) an online meeting might prove advantageous to early-career scholars in particular who might otherwise be unable to attend in person owing to financial or logistical challenges. There is no event fee.

Individual presentations of 15 minutes will be followed by 10 minutes of open discussion. Successful applicants are encouraged to see their work as a potential contribution towards a formal publication of our proceedings, subject to further consultation, selection, and review processes.

Abstract Proposals

Please submit your abstract (max. 250 words) to r.n.whitefield@durham.ac.uk. Proposals should be submitted no later than 6pm on Friday 26th November 2021 and the Assessment Panel will notify their decision by mid-December. The Conference Programme will be published on 14th December 2021.

This symposium is convened by the project's Co-Principal Investigator, Ricky Whitefield, an anthropologist and theologian currently serving as Junior Research Fellow at St John's College and part-time Tutor in the Department of Theology and Religion. For all enquiries, or to make any suggestions and provide feedback, please contact r.n.whitefield@durham.ac.uk.

To register, follow this link and complete the form [here](#).

Religions Special Issue: Birth and Death: Studying Ritual, Embodied Practices and Spirituality at the Start and End of Life

Submission deadline: 01 October 2021

Special Issue Editors:

Dr. Joanna Wojtkowiak, University of Humanistic Studies, J.Wojtkowiak@UvH.nl

Dr. Brenda Mathijssen, University of Groningen, brenda.mathijssen@rug.nl

Details:

Birth and death are fundamental human experiences. Both life-transitions are meaningful and profound but can also lead to ambiguous feelings, negotiated in embodied, cultural, spiritual and symbolic practices (Hallam et al., 1999; Kaufman and Morgan, 2005; Mathijssen, 2018; Wojtkowiak, 2020). The study of birth and death as existential transitions, comparing and contrasting these two life-events from a ritual and embodied perspective, can reveal novel insights into spirituality and religiosity. In this Special Issue of *Religions*, we want to unravel these questions and explore new theoretical and empirical research on birth and death from multidisciplinary perspectives, such as cultural anthropology, religious studies, chaplaincy studies, medical and cultural psychology and psychology of religion and related disciplines.

The importance of studying birth and death from an embodied, ritualized and symbolic perspective relates to several observations. First of all, all humans are related to their own birth and death and often involved in the birth and death of others (Hennessey, 2019; Schües, 2008). However, entering the world, as well as saying farewell to loved ones, is not a linear transition. Liminal and ambiguous meanings accompany pregnancy and birth, as well as

death and dying. Cultural, spiritual and ritual practices accompany this transition and accommodate possible ambiguous states. Secondly, both life transitions are related to spiritual and existential questioning, revealing what matters to us (Wojtkowiak and Crowther, 2018). Thirdly, rituals and embodied practices—varying from quotidian storytelling, performances, meditation and beautification practices to initiation rites and funerals—are grounded in the body, the senses and material culture. Gaining insights into the significance of embodiment, the physical and material dimension of spirituality has been underdeveloped in the literature (McGuire 2006). Fourthly, because of changing religious and cultural contexts, such as secularization, medicalization, migration and globalization, the way we frame and give meaning to birth and death are changing and leading to pluralistic and possibly conflicting meaning frames. Rituals at the start and end of life have also been changing (Grimes, 2002). What kind of challenges do we face in changing birth and death contexts? What can we learn about meaning making and spirituality by studying birth and death rituals? How is embodied spirituality negotiated in birth and death rituals and practices?

We invite scholars to submit papers on the following topics:

- Rituals and ritualization of birth and/or death (such as pregnancy and birth, dying, death and mourning, commemoration, memorials, private, individual ritualizing);
- Embodied spirituality at birth and/or death from theoretical and empirical perspectives (such as midwifery, chaplaincy or personal practices);
- Social and cultural meanings and ambiguity surrounding personhood at birth or death from an embodied, ritualized perspective (when do we become a person/social being? And how is this manifested in embodied practices? See, for instance, Kaufman and Morgan, 2005);
- Philosophical perspectives on ritual at birth and death (e.g., phenomenological approaches to ritualizing pregnancy, birth, death and dying).

Manuscript Submission Information

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“Open Theology”; "Death and Religion" Issue

Edited by: Khyati Tripathi, (UPES, India), Jennifer Moran Stritch (Limerick Institute of Technology, Ireland) and Peter G.A.Versteeg (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands).

“Open Theology” (<https://www.degruyter.com/journal/key/OPTH/html>) invites submissions for the topical issue "Death and Religion".

Flyer:

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Death and religion share an interdependent relation. Where death is an event or state that threatens to disintegrate worlds and meaning, religion can be seen as a practice that categorizes, consoles and makes sense of this kind of disintegration. According to Oxford dictionary, death is defined as “end of life”, but behind this simple definition, there is a web of complex ideas that could be understood from not just biological but also religious or cultural perspectives. Death has been conceptualized differently in different religious traditions as their texts and practices demonstrate. According to Lifton, religion is ‘life power’ and dominates death. Similarly, Davies put forth rituals as culture’s ‘words against death’.

The relationship between death and religion should be seen as a broad scholarly query, which includes philosophical and theological questions, as well as more applied perspectives such as social work. Although death is a clinical process of organs that cease to function, dying and death are events that are surrounded by various sense-making practices, ranging from intricate traditional ceremonies as part of established religious repertoires, to more personal, individualized rituals. Social-cultural context, therefore, is of utmost importance to understand how we interact with dying persons and dead bodies, and why we do it in that particular way.

In theology we see how faith traditions historically account for the reality of death, reflecting upon its existential meaning and thus trying to understand how to deal with the event of death. As such, a theology of death raises both practical (e.g. in spiritual care) and systematical (e.g. in ethics) questions regarding death and dying.

In psychology death anxiety or fear of death invited a great deal of interest starting in the late 1950s with Fiefel’s work on death anxiety and religion. Different studies pointed at different relationships between death anxiety and religiousness; some studies found a positive relationship between the two while others found an inverse relationship. Some research argued for a curvilinear relationship between death anxiety and religiousness, explaining that moderately religious participants have more death anxiety than those who are extremely religious or not religious at all. The relationship between religion and death anxiety has been an inconclusive one because of the multidimensional nature of both religion and death anxiety. There is, however, a lack of scholarship on death anxiety and religion in non-western cultures.

In cultural anthropology, death studies have developed into a substantial research niche. There has been ample attention for practices pertaining to e.g. the process of dying, death as

transition, as well as to the interaction with the dead body. Important here, too, is the global perspective on death, also in the sense of engaging with ontologies of life and death outside of the established scientific-medical spectrum.

This special issue encourages scholars from different disciplines, not just restricted to the ones we mentioned, to contribute to this debate. Of special interest are situations in which religion becomes overbearing and a burden to carry forward in times of death, or if religious practices are obstructed, for example, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. How do these crisis situations affect the relationship between religion and death? This special issue aims at invoking curiosity, enquiry and interest in looking at the different facets of this topic.

The special issue on 'Death and Religion' invites empirical (qualitative and quantitative), review/conceptual and analytical papers focusing on the different facets of this relationship from scholars in different disciplines such as: Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Theology, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Thanatology, Health Humanities, Social Care and Social Work.

Among others, topics or areas of focus might include:

- Death anxiety and religiosity in non-western cultures
- The different perspectives to 'Extrinsic Religiosity'
- Is 'Intrinsic Religiosity' really the reliever of anxiety?
- Psychological/sociological/psychosocial significance of death rituals
- The changing nature of death rituals
- Personal religious beliefs and ideas about death
- Belief in afterlife and death anxiety
- The changing relationship between death and religion due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- The non-religious traditions and death
- Autoethnographic accounts of performing/witnessing death rituals
- Death as latent and religion as evident in Freudian texts
- Religious Literacy and the end of life care
- Extinction as ultimate death and other morbid anxieties of the Anthropocene

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All contributions will undergo critical peer-review before being accepted for publication.

Further questions about this thematic issue can be addressed to Khyati Tripathi at khyatitripathi27@gmail.com. In case of technical or financial questions, please contact journal Managing Editor Katarzyna Tempczyk at katarzyna.tempczyk@degruyter.com

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