

WS 29

Negotiating the non-negotiable: death and burial as sites of contest

30.09.2019, 16:00-17:30 Uhr, Raum D436

Organisiert von / organized by:

Jeanine Dageyeli (Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan)

For many people, the correct handling of death entails consequences for human-human and human-non-human relations, as e.g. between people and the supernatural world. Ceremonial acts or customs are, however, increasingly subject to reconsideration. In a context where many societies experience ideological closures and retreat to identity politics, death and burial have become symbolically laden sites of religious and ethnic fray. A case of death may engender negotiations over how to dispose of the body or ashes correctly, where, when and accompanied by which rituals; simultaneously the varying positions may be immediately declared non-negotiable. These issues become even more sensitive when suicide, violent death that seeks retaliation or compensation, or religious concerns over procedures are involved. At the same time, the increasing possibility of prolonging life by the advancements of biotechnology opens up new questions on the nature of death, care and self-determination which are often conceived as non-negotiable.

This workshop takes up two of the DGSKA's conference focal issues: (a) what renders positions of individuals, groups and/or administrations concerning death non-negotiable and what are the consequences if opposing parties do not subscribe to this non-negotiability, and (b) how are new forms of ideological closure and social boundary-making in cases of death experienced within and beyond nation states? How and when does the nonnegotiable becomes negotiable, when and by whom is mediation accepted or not, and how do conflicts materialize if no compromise can be reached? How do conceptualizations of the 'right' death and burial play out within capitalist/religious (revivalist)/ media and commodity cultures? Specifically interesting are situations where two or more moral and/or political orders compete.

The workshop invites contributions to these and related questions which may be sent in German or English, with reference to any time or region. Papers should be circulated among the participants prior to the conference in order to foster the discussion. A subsequent publication is intended.

Vortragende / Speakers :

Markus Höhne (Universität Leipzig)

**Negotiating the violent past through forensic anthropology:
Clashes of norms around grave sites in a post-civil war setting**

"We want to reunite the living with the dead", "People have the right to know [what happened to their loved ones]." These were formulations used by forensic anthropologists from Peru who visited Somaliland, a secessionist republic in northwestern Somalia, upon invitation of the government to investigate mass graves dating from the first phase of the Somali civil war in the 1980s. Yet, the experts were shocked by the resistance by relatives of the dead who demonstrated at the grave sites, arguing that it was against Islam to open graves and that this would only bring back emotional pain without any gain. Government officials rushed to the sites and argued that it was in accordance with Islam to open mass graves and provide those "hurled into a hole" with a proper burial. They also stressed that Somaliland would profit from the international forensic experts

proving “genocide”; this could be used to advance the country’s claim for recognition. My presentation is based on field work covering several rounds of exhumations, during which I observed and followed-up the negotiations about the proper way of handling the violent past in the post-civil war setting of Somaliland.

Johanna Sarre (Universität Bayreuth)

Burials and graveyards - beginning or end of negotiations of belonging?

The Nubian inhabitants of Nairobi’s biggest slum, Kibera, have to negotiate their Kenyan citizenship in multiple ways – as descendants of ‘Sudanese soldiers’ in the colonial troops, their belonging is questioned. In the Kenyan, ethnicity, citizenship and land rights are decisive factors in the negotiation where to bury a person. Graves confirm both, the ancestral home and the person’s belonging to the respective collective (family, ethnic group and ultimately Kenyan nation). Drawing on material from ethnographic research around the Kibra (Nubian) Muslim Cemetery and cases of contested belonging at death, I analyze Nubian burial practices as negotiations of belonging. I contextualize these with the literature on debated burial places in the Kenyan context of politicized ethnic regionalism, e.g. Burying S.M. (Cohen&Odhiambo). I suggest moving beyond discourses of autochthony (being ‘born from the soil’ (Geschiere)) and towards a critical analysis of who is buried in the soil. In the case of Kibera’s Nubians, who claim the slum as their (ancestral) home, death is not the end, but the beginning of negotiations of belonging.

Jeanine Dagey (Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan)

Funerary identity politics between tradition, bureaucratization and globalized Islam

Perceptions of a mutual influence of the living and dead are prevalent throughout Central Asia, and the way funeral and mourning ceremonies are conducted is said to have direct influence on this relationship, thus also on the livelihoods of the bereaved. Public, visible mourning, especially the emotional performance of women, is a key element in so-called traditional funerary rites. Since the first introduction of globalized, scripturalist interpretations of Islam in the 1980s and an increased influx after the collapse of the Soviet Union, disputes, within families, communities as well as the wider public, about the religious rightfulness of certain funerary and commemorative practices have intensified. Practices once considered normative and non-negotiable increasingly undergo critical assessment, be it by state bureaucrats eager to standardize burials and curb costs, Islamic institutions that call for a purification of rituals, or individuals who feel strangled in their personal expression of grief by “too much tradition”. The presentation is based on field work conducted in Uzbekistan, mainly Bukhara and Tashkent, from 2009 onwards and on some preliminary observations in Kazakhstan. It argues that in opening up putatively non-negotiable funerary practices to contestation in the emotionally stressful circumstances after a case of death, burials have become one site of negotiating and asserting claims on multiple individual and collective future identities.

Volker Gottowik (Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt/Main)

Liebe, Tod und Tantra:

Heterodoxe Ritualpraktiken im Kontext islamischer Heiligenverehrung auf Java

Pilgerfahrten zu Heiligengräbern sind auf Java fester Bestandteil der rituellen Praktiken. Was an diesen Gräbern im Einklang mit dem Islam praktiziert werden darf, ist jedoch hochgradig umstritten. Die Frage nach dem rechten Umgang mit Tod und Begräbnis spaltet die muslimische Gemein-

schaft, zugleich wird immer restriktiver zwischen erlaubter Erinnerung an den Toten und verbote-
ner Verehrung des Verstorbenen unterschieden. Gleichwohl dulden die Behörden die systemati-
sche Verletzung gesellschaftlicher Normen und Werten, wenn Pilger sich zu ritual seks an Heili-
gengräbern verabreden oder – soweit es männliche Pilger betrifft – die Dienstleistungen von Pros-
tituierten in Anspruch nehmen, um Verstorbene nicht nur um ihren Segen (berkah), sondern auch
um Reichtum und Glück zu bitten (pesugihan). Die gesellschaftlichen Auseinandersetzungen mit
diesen Praktiken, die tantrische Einflüsse erkennen lassen, stehen im Zentrum dieses Vortrags. Sie
sollen im Hinblick auf die Frage untersucht werden, wie sich die Konjunktur heterodoxer Ritual-
praktiken mit der These von der fortschreitenden Islamisierung der indonesischen Gesellschaft
vereinbaren lässt.