

Abstract:

The aim of this course is to introduce the students to the ethnographic studies of death, dying, loss and the memories of the dead. Mourning, burial rituals and the symbolic expressions around the dead body are well-known anthropological topics. Next to the basic anthropological theories this course provides an understanding about current critical debates around death, dying and disposal, within in the framework of anthropological theory. The students gain insight in predicaments regarding embryo-selection, euthanasia, (modern) mourning rituals and the way death is represented and experienced, performed and denied in different societies. The objective of this course is to discuss the questions surrounding death and to reflect on loss in various cultural settings, with a special focus on social media and new mourning performances.

Who is dying, when, why and how is embedded in social, cultural and economic processes and deeply rooted in political and cultural performances. Next to ethnographic case studies and canonical anthropological theory about death rituals, this course introduces the student to different approaches to death, from pregnancy loss, suicide, violent death and 'a good death'. Up to the commemorations of the dead, the students encounter the emotional, political and social reactions to private and public death. (Possible: Next to the anthropological literature psychoanalysis is introduced to gain more insight into the fascination of Thanatos and Eros, the anxiety and the desire surrounding death and the dead body.)

Literature:

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