



# Dying Alone and Its Afterlives in Contact-less Sociality



Opening: Public Panel Discussion

**Helping the last move: Caring for the dead nobody wants**

on 17 April 3 pm at Max Planck Institute for Human Development  
in German and English (simultaneous translations provided)

Conference organisers:

Mika Toyota (Max Planck Institute for Human Development)  
Kristine Krause (University of Amsterdam)

For more information:





# Dying Alone and Its Afterlives in Contact-less Socialities

## International Conference, 17–19 April 2023

### Venue:

First day Max Planck Institute for Human Development,  
Lentzeallee 94, 14195 Berlin

Second and third days Harnack House, Ihnesstraße 16, 14195 Berlin

## Programme

**Monday, 17 April 2023** @ Max Planck Institute for Human Development

15:00 Welcome address

Large Conference Hall

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Ute Frevert, Director of the Center for the History of Emotions,  
Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin

Mika Toyota, Researcher at the Center for the History of Emotions,  
Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin and conference organizer

15:30 Public panel discussion (session 1)

“Helping the last move: Caring for the dead nobody wants”

Large Conference Hall

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Unclaimed dead challenge the living. They confront us with questions about loneliness and isolation, expose inequalities and social fragmentation and mobilize unexpected care beyond bureaucratic or professional duties. What does it mean that there are increasing numbers of unclaimed dead? Who is charged with caring for their disposal, who feels responsible and why? What does it say about how lived lives are valued if their deaths are abandoned? In this public discussion, scholars, professionals and artists who are involved in caring for the unclaimed dead as representatives of local authorities, social workers or coordinators of special funeral rites will engage with these questions.

Joris van Casteren, journalist, poet, writer and coordinator of the foundation  
*De Eenzame Uitvaart* (The lonely funeral), Amsterdam

Christina Martin, District Council funeral officer, South East England,  
stand-up comedian and writer, author of the book *Ashes to Admin:  
Tales from the Caseload of a Council Funeral Officer*

Susanne Loke, remedial teacher in the Ruhr district; she received her PhD  
in social science on “Lonely Dying and Undiscovered Deaths in the City”

Pamela Prickett, sociologist, writer and associate professor at the  
University of Amsterdam, author of the book “The Unclaimed”

Moderator: Kristine Krause, anthropologist and associate professor  
at the University of Amsterdam

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17:00 Reception (finger-food buffet-style)

Foyer



Tuesday 18 April 2023 @ Harnack House

8:45 Registration

Lynen Room

9:00 Session 2: "Lonely death": Family ideology and public imaginaries

Lynen Room

The recent rise of "lonely deaths" (孤独死 in Japanese and 고독사 in Korean), which refers to cases where people have died alone and gone undetected for an extended period of time, has triggered public anxiety, policy responses and a specialized cleaning care industry in both Japan and Korea. Why is the incidence of socially alienated lonely death more common for men across generations? What kind of practical and emotional effects does this new service industry have? The session explores the socio-cultural meaning of the phenomenon of "lonely death" in relation to family ideology and masculinity in Japan and Korea.

Mika Toyota, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany:

*Confronting the 'lonely deaths' of others: The emotional labour of post-mortem cleaning workers in Japan*

Keong-Suk Park, Seoul National University, South Korea:

*The logic of lonely deaths: Exploring the historical link between the absent patriarch and the replication of men's lonely deaths in Korea*

Hyangjin Lee, Rikkyo University, Tokyo, Japan:

*The social imaginary "lonely death" in Plan 75 (2022) and The Bacchus Lady (2016)*

11:00 Coffee break

Planck Lobby

11:30 Session 3: Border death: Tracing the origins and its aftermaths

Lynen Room

Border regimes kill. But what is left of the bodies, belongings and memories of the migrants who perished during their "illegalized" crossings? How do such "remains" encounter the living, and what effects do they have on their ordinary lives? Is death at the border to be conceptualized as a separate form of death (bare death) as opposed to what is socially and culturally imagined as a "normal death"? If so, how do we articulate this "separation" or "exclusion" of some dead from others? Building on the seminal work of Giorgio Agamben, who traces the birth of western politics through the articulation of bare life and a politically qualified life, in this session we will attempt to reflect on the origins and aftermaths of border death through an ethnographically informed approach based on everyday eventfulness. When is a "death" bare, and to what extent can scholars engage productively in the process of exposing such "bareness" and what it entails for the living in the present and the immediate future?

Alessandro Corso, University of Oxford, UK:

*Border death: Tracing the origins and its aftermaths*

Hans Lucht, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark:

*The body stays, the soul returns: Repercussions of migrant deaths in Central Region, Ghana*

12:30 Lunch

Restaurant in the Liebig vault



cont. **Tuesday 18 April 2023** @ Harnack House

**14:00 Session 4: Necrosociality and grievability**

**Lynen Room**

This session examines the material and symbolic construction of necrosocialities, the relationships produced in the wake of death, not only between the living and the dead, but also between the dead themselves and between seemingly unconnected people and social imaginaries. While necrosociality provides a space of potential for those who had been invisibilized or forgotten in life to be mourned after death, its material emplacement also makes it a site of potential contestation and transgression. How does one mourn those whose corpse remains, but whose name or relational attachments have been lost? How might acts intended to make 'disposable' or 'ungrievable lives' grievable cycle back into the world of the living to foster new forms of belonging and solidarity?

Pamela Prickett, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands:

*"If no one grieves, no one will remember":*

*The creation of social ties through death rituals*

Yiannis Papadakis, University of Cyprus, Nicosia and Fuyuki Makino, University of Tokyo:

*Close together and far apart: Necrosocialities in urban Japan*

**15:20–15:40 Coffee break (20 min) in the Planck Lobby**

Aslı Zengin, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, USA:

*The cemetery for the Kimsesiz: Deathscapes in the margins of Turkey*

Erica Baffelli, University of Manchester, UK:

*Connecting the dead: Collective graves and memorial rituals in San'ya*

Moderator: Jason Danely, Oxford Brookes University, UK

**17:00 Publication planning meeting**

**Lynen Room**

**18:00 Dinner with dinner talk (for active participants only)**

**Einstein Lounge**

Mika Toyota, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany



Wednesday, 19 April 2023 @ Harnack House

10:00 Session 5: Roundtable “Ethics, reflexivity and methodology”

Humboldt Room

When researching phenomena such as contact-less socialities, loneliness and death, issues of ethics, reflexivity and methodology are an inseparable triad. As researchers we must question how we enter the field to explore people’s alienating experiences, and how we can work with necessary respect and empathy. How do we reflect on our position and justify our presence in the lives of the people who give so much to research? How do we reflect on the knowledge production within these relationships? Which methods allow us to answer our questions while remaining cognisant of the humanity of our participants and alert to our ethical responsibilities?

Claire Moon, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Maya Mayblin, University of Edinburgh, UK:

*Reflections on the implicit and explicit ethics of navigating public health funerals*

Moderator: Olena Fedyuk, Central European University, Vienna, Austria

12:00 Lunch

Restaurant in the Liebig vault

13:00 Session 6: Roundtable “Dying alone in contact-less sociality”

Humboldt Room

The term “contact-less sociality” refers to the ways in which people are virtually connected without physical face-to-face interaction. The social distancing measures during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated such contact-less sociality, along with the adoption of digital technology in our everyday practice – people are virtually always connected, yet at the same time, anxious about not being connected. This session explores how contemporary communication technology could further change the meaning of “social isolation”, “loneliness” and “solitude” in the future, and how it may affect single adults, particularly in the later phase of their lives.

Zohar Lederman, University of Hong Kong:

*Dying a Lonely Death: A Conceptual and Normative Analysis*

Marcos Freire de Andrade Neves, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany:

*The afterlives of pandemic isolation: Death and dying in contexts of social distancing*

Moderator: Mika Toyota, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany

15:00 Coffee break

Planck Lobby

15:20 Final discussion

Humboldt Room

16:00 End of conference