

# Grave-visiting Rituals, (Dis)continuing Bonds and Religiosity

*Anne Kjærsgaard & Eric Venbrux*

Die letzte Wohnung aller Sterblichen ist das Grab. Die Leichname aller übrigen Kreaturen der Erde verdunsten auf ihrer Oberfläche; nur der Mensch wühlt seine Brüder unter die Erde, und will ihre Sterblichkeit verbergen, indem er ihnen ein Grab zurechtet. Und, weil er ihnen Unsterblichkeit wünscht, so setzt er einen Grabstein darauf, den Vorübergehenden ihren Namen zu nennen, bis er endlich auch unter der zermalmenden Hand der Zeit seine Endschaft findet.

Joachim Hacker (1796)<sup>1</sup>

When God is dead, the cult of the dead may become the only authentic religion.

Philippe Ariès (1981[1977])<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

In a piece in the Danish newspaper *Weekend Avisen*, Mads Hermansen expressed his discontent with the near monopoly of the national Lutheran Church on the control of churchyards. In the article, Hermansen makes a plea for taking the control over the dead out of the hands of official religion to enable people to engage freely in practices of their choice, whether condoned by the religious authorities or not. Although he is not a member of the church, he values the practice of talking to the dead.<sup>3</sup> Talking to the dead appears to be widespread, irrespective of religious affiliation or non-affiliation. Stringer considers it a basic form of religiosity as it entails communication with non-empirical others.<sup>4</sup> It could also be termed a religious practice as it transcends death, crossing the boundary between life and death.<sup>5</sup> Scholars have long regarded the inability to embrace our mortality as a source of religiosity. According to May, “At its root, religion consists of some kind of experience of sacred power”, arguing that even in modernity the sacred power of death has been a

<sup>1</sup> J.L. HACKER: *Thanatologie oder Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Gebiete der Gräber: ein unterhalten-des Lesebuch für Kranke und Sterbende*, vol. 2. (Leipzig 1796) 23.

<sup>2</sup> P. ARIÈS: *The hour of our death* (Harmondsworth 1981[1977]) 543.

<sup>3</sup> M. HERMANSEN: ‘Der skal drikkes glædesgravøl’, in *Weekend Avisen*, 16 April 2014.

<sup>4</sup> M.D. STRINGER: ‘Chatting with Gran at her grave: Ethnography and the definition of religion’, in P. CRUCHLEY-JONES (ed.): *God at ground level* (Frankfurt 2008) 23-29, and M.D. STRINGER: *Contemporary Western ethnography and the definition of religion* (London 2008).

<sup>5</sup> D. CHIDESTER: *Patterns of transcendence: Religion, death, and dying* (Belmont, CA 2002<sup>2</sup>) 3.

main stay.<sup>6</sup> Hermansen's piece in *Weekend Avisen* reminds us that, albeit grossly overlooked by students of religion, we may find answers to people's religiosity in the cemetery.



**Illustration 1:** A drink for the deceased, left on a grave in Nijmegen, the Netherlands [photo: Eric Venbrux]

We refer to religion as practiced, 'lived religion', in which, as McGuire points out, practical coherence and efficacy in dealing with problems of everyday life supersedes logical consistency.<sup>7</sup> The religious practices concerned are not necessarily confined to the bounds of institutional religion. Maintaining ongoing bonds with the dead, implied by some practices at graves in Denmark, for example, does not sit well with the Lutheran teaching that the living can no longer do anything for the dead.<sup>8</sup> People can talk to the dead anywhere of course, but if they have something truly important to say they tend to do so at the grave-side.<sup>9</sup> Grave-visiting also involves other practices of a religious nature and merits our attention.

Ariès observed how in the nineteenth century the public cemetery became "the focus of all the piety for the dead; I would even call it a religious institu-

<sup>6</sup> W.F. MAY: 'The sacral power of death in contemporary experience', in *Social Research* 39/3 (1972) 463-488, esp. 465, passim.

<sup>7</sup> M.B. MCGUIRE: *Lived religion: Faith and practice in everyday life* (Oxford 2008) 15.

<sup>8</sup> A. KJÆRSGAARD: 'Sorg og ritualer på kirkegården', in *Kirkegården* 35/4 (2015) 20-22.

<sup>9</sup> STRINGER: *Contemporary Western ethnography* 62.

tion.”<sup>10</sup> Goody and Poppi, who looked at Anglo-American and Italian cemeteries, confirm that grave-visiting “continues to be a prominent feature of an otherwise heavily secularized society.”<sup>11</sup> Bailey even deems the churchyard of greater significance for people’s religiosity than the church.<sup>12</sup> He considers grave-visiting a ‘ritual’, as well as “a self-perpetuating religious practice.”<sup>13</sup> Remarkably, however, the research on grave-visiting in countries that are often portrayed as highly secularized, such as Denmark and the Netherlands,<sup>14</sup> is still in its infancy. We suggest that such studies in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Denmark are significant to gain insight into religious practices that continue to exist under the radar and reveal something about the limits of secularization.<sup>15</sup>

We propose to study grave-visiting as ritual. Grave-visiting rituals, as we would like to term them, are telling about the relationship between the living and the deceased. It is now commonly accepted that the survivors maintain ‘a continuing bond’ with the deceased.<sup>16</sup> We argue that such bonds, transcending physical death, involve religiosity and relate to the process of ‘becoming dead’ during which social death is staved off.

## 2. Grave-visiting rituals

Grave-visiting can be understood as a ritual. Turner defines ritual as “a stereotypical sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests.”<sup>17</sup> This definition, we contend, applies to grave-visiting.

<sup>10</sup> P. ARIÈS: *The hour of our death* (Harmondsworth 1981[1977]) 524.

<sup>11</sup> J. GOODY & C. POPPI: ‘Flowers and bones: Approaches to the dead in Anglo-American and Italian cemeteries’, in *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 36/1 (1994) 146-175, esp. 150.

<sup>12</sup> E.I. BAILEY: *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society* (Leuven 2006) 234-238.

<sup>13</sup> BAILEY: *Implicit Religion* 234. See also, ARIÈS: *The hour of our death* 549.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, the claims in T. BERNTS & J. BERGHUIJS: *God in Nederland 1996-2015* (Utrecht 2016) and in P. ZUCKERMAN: *Society without God* (New York 2008).

<sup>15</sup> In view of Norris and Inglehart’s thesis that religiosity tends to decrease when there is a high level of existential security (as in the three countries mentioned). P. NORRIS & R. INGLEHART: *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide* (Cambridge 2004).

<sup>16</sup> The concept of continuing bonds replaced the earlier emphasis on breaking ties with the deceased or ‘letting go’ in the psychology of bereavement. D. KLASS, P.R. SILVERMAN & S.L. NICKMAN (eds.): *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief* (Washington, DC 1996); C. VALENTINE: *Bereavement narratives: Continuing bonds in the twenty-first century* (London 2008).

<sup>17</sup> V.W. TURNER: ‘Symbols in African ritual’, in *Science* 179 (1973) 1100-1105, esp. 1100.



**Illustration 2:** Churchyard in Jelling, Denmark [photo: Anne Kjærsgaard]

Cemeteries, surrounded by hedges, fences or walls, are places set apart for the dead.<sup>18</sup> The presence of the dead demands appropriate and respectful behavior of any visitors to these sequestered areas.<sup>19</sup> The graves are marked and also have boundaries.<sup>20</sup> A tendency exists to treat them as private spaces, reminiscent of a home and/or garden.<sup>21</sup> They happen to be loci for the exchange between the living and the deceased.

Gestures made, words uttered or inscribed and objects given and/or placed, are part and parcel of the ritual of visiting the grave. The deceased, receiving the visitors, may be considered to be lending an ear and offering companionship, guidance or help.

Grave-visiting rituals have a number of features in common. The most extensive research to date on grave-visiting has been conducted by Francis, Kellehar and Neophytou in London cemeteries. They write: “We learned that men, women, and children of all ages, religions, ethnicities and income levels visit

<sup>18</sup> G. SCHMIED: *Friedhofsgespräche. Untersuchungen zum “Wohnort der Toten”* (Wiesbaden 2002) 57-58; J. RUGG: ‘Defining the place of burial: What makes a cemetery a cemetery?’, in *Mortality* 5/3 (2000) 259-275, esp. 261-262.

<sup>19</sup> M. WARTMANN: ‘Leben auf Zürcher Friedhöfen. Impressionen, Gespräche, Beobachtungen’, in *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 82/1-2 (1986) 30-40, esp. 39.

<sup>20</sup> SCHMIED: *Friedhofsgespräche* 113-116.

<sup>21</sup> E. HALLAM & J. HOCKEY: *Death, memory and material culture* (Oxford 2001) 96, 147; K. WORPOLE: *Last landscapes: The architecture of the cemetery in the West* (London 2003) 93.

cemeteries, at frequencies ranging from daily to once a year.”<sup>22</sup> What is more, “the data suggests a relatively similar range of activities across the different religious and cultural groups at the graveside.”<sup>23</sup> These activities also come to the fore in the studies of grave-visiting by Schmied in Germany and by Bachelor in Australia.<sup>24</sup>

Bachelor ranks placing flowers, maintaining the grave and talking to the deceased as the top three activities.<sup>25</sup> Visits to the grave are bracketed by ritualized greetings and leave-takings. As a Danish widow puts it, in an interview with the first author: “It’s simply a habit, we’ve done it from the first day we visited the grave, the first thing we do is to go and stroke the headstone and say hello, and the last thing we do before we go is to kiss it and touch it again.”<sup>26</sup> She describes the average visit to her deceased husband’s grave as follows:

I park the car and then I walk through the gate and walk up to him. When I’m entering I’m already thinking of him. And just when I reach the border of the grave I say: “Hi luv”.

[AK: Do you say this aloud or to yourself?]

No, I say it aloud. I also sit and talk with him out loud. Then I tell him what’s been happening and what his grandson can do these days. Then I tell him off; why is he not here, why has he left me? We have to discuss that occasionally. But otherwise I just sit and tell him that I miss him, how things are going in my life and how sorry I feel for myself that he is not here with all the health problems I suffer from.

Yeah, you know, just everyday stuff, and then I tidy up a bit if there is something to do, but generally the churchyard caretaker looks after things. We make sure he looks after things just to be on the safe side so that it is always nice. Then I change the candle and just stand and chat with him for a little while. And then, when it’s time to go, I give the gravestone a few strokes and a kiss and then I look over at him, to where he’s buried and say: “Bye luv, take care, until the next time”.

Although the widow laments her deceased husband’s absence, she feels and acts out being in touch with him at his graveside. The notion that the deceased is somehow present and registers the utterances and actions of the visitors ap-

<sup>22</sup> D. FRANCIS, L. KELLAHER & G. NEOPHYTOU: *The secret cemetery* (New York 2005) 20.

<sup>23</sup> D. FRANCIS, L. KELLAHER & G. NEOPHYTOU: ‘Sustaining cemeteries: the user perspective’, in *Mortality* 5/1 (2000) 34–52, esp. 43.

<sup>24</sup> SCHMIED: *Friedhofsgespräche*, P. BACHELOR: *Sorrow and solace: The social world of the cemetery* (New York 2004).

<sup>25</sup> BACHELOR: *Sorrow and solace* 107–115. Cf. SCHMIED: *Friedhofsgespräche* 153–157, 85–95, 37–44; FRANCIS, KELLAHER & NEOPHYTOU: *The secret cemetery*. In a recent survey on grave visiting in the region of Valkenswaard, the Netherlands, 20 out of 41 respondents appeared to be talking to the dead. H. DE JONG: *Mam, ik kom efkes buurten*. Een onderzoek onder nabestaanden naar de betekenis van het bezoek aan de herdenkingsplek voor hun overledenen. Master thesis, Religious Studies, Radboud University (Nijmegen 2015) 33. In Schmied’s research in Germany 34 out of 43 grave-visitors said that they talked to the dead. SCHMIED: *Friedhofsgespräche* 37.

<sup>26</sup> Interview by Anne Kjærsgaard, 19 January 2015.

pears to be quite common. You can almost physically be in touch by tending the grave or caressing the stone, as well as communicate with the deceased.<sup>27</sup>

Rugg rightly notes that far too little attention has been given to people's agency within the framework of cemetery regulations.<sup>28</sup> Although, at first sight, Danish churchyards may appear to be highly secularized, they do in fact materialize Protestant norms. Cemetery regulations and appeals to aesthetics seek to prevent religious practices that are not in accordance with the ban on the living maintaining relations with the dead.<sup>29</sup> It has, for instance, been argued that the churchyard ought not to become an amusement park ('a Tivoli') in the case of a mother wanting to place electric lights at the grave of her daughter during

Christmas time, as all she could give her was some light in the dark.<sup>30</sup> Traces of small ritual gestures that keep within the confines of cemetery regulations, however, can be found in almost every churchyard. To give just one example: a thirteen-year old girl in Jutland went on a school trip for several days, but she wanted to stay in touch with her deceased mother. From her allowance she bought a small figure of a Smurf with a laptop and placed it at her mother's grave [see illustration 3], so that it could write to her mother for her.<sup>31</sup>



**Illustration 3:** A daughter's means of communication with her deceased mother [photo: Anne Kjærsgaard]

In her documentary *Forever*, Dutch filmmaker Heddy Honigmann demonstrates how visiting graves at the famous Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris involves a

<sup>27</sup> FRANCIS, KELLAHER & NEOPHYTOU: 'Sustaining cemeteries' 43-44; BAILEY: *Implicit Religion* 236.

<sup>28</sup> J. RUGG: 'Choice and constraint in the burial landscape: re-evaluating twentieth-century commemoration in the English churchyard', in *Mortality* 18/3 (2013) 215-234.

<sup>29</sup> A. KJÆRSGAARD: 'Finding consolation in churchyards in Lutheran Denmark', in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 68/1-2 (2014) 101-119.

<sup>30</sup> KJÆRSGAARD: 'Finding consolation in churchyards' 115-116. In similar vein photos were not allowed to be placed on graves in the predominantly Protestant, Swiss city of Zurich, because the cemetery ought not to become 'a photo album'. A. HAUSER: *Von den letzten Dingen. Tod, Begräbnis und Friedhöfe in der Schweiz 1700-1990* (Zürich 1994) 283.

<sup>31</sup> Interview by Anne Kjærsgaard, 15 September 2013.

number of practices that suggest a communication with the dead. We see ample graves being watered, women touching, wiping off and washing the stone slabs, and people bringing flowers and small gifts. One woman sits down in a folding chair at a grave and reads from a book. Another tells the deceased what she's been doing since her last visit. People stand at graves, deep in contemplation.<sup>32</sup>

Other gestures are manifold, such as the placement of written messages, (birthday) cards, drawings of children, photographs and small ornaments or statues. Candles are lit, drink is splashed or poured for the deceased, cigarettes or cigars and food are offered and all belong to the rich repertoire of grave-visiting rituals. Across Europe, religious rites, such as prayer, leaving pebbles, burning incense and blessing the grave (i.e. the deceased) with holy water also occur. A bond with the deceased is reinforced by graveside visits on special days, such as birthdays, the day of death, wedding anniversaries, Christmas, Easter and All Souls' or Memorial Day.



**Illustration 4:** Tending the grave and talking to the dead [photo: Eric Venbrux]

Talking to the deceased and the celebration of posthumous birthdays are clear indications of an ongoing bond with the person who has died. The care for the deceased as expressed at the grave is often in death as in life. For example, one of our informants would bring his mother a bunch of fresh flowers every week.

<sup>32</sup> H. HONIGMANN (director): *Forever* (95 min.; Cobos Films / NPS, The Netherlands 2006).

He continued to do so to her grave, where he also continued his conversations with her.<sup>33</sup> Grave-visiting rituals involve the senses: touch, smell, sight and sometimes taste and hearing. Chimes and little windmills produce sounds, so do birds attracted by water basins on graves. Tending the grave by putting in plants, placing flowers and objects, arranging things and cleaning can be perceived as ‘physical contact by proxy’.<sup>34</sup>

Benches at graves are a tell-tale sign that the deceased merits attention, similar to candles at graves that have been lit and continue to burn after the visitor departs. Gifts for the deceased symbolize a form of attention giving, as well as imply some kind of reciprocity.<sup>35</sup> After tending the grave, a visitor repeatedly used to tell the deceased that “everything is ok”.<sup>36</sup> The visitor will appease the deceased with his words and indirectly himself. The ritual act of maintaining the grave seems to serve as a means of gaining control over a disruptive situation. Another recurrent ritualistic gesture with the same intent is taking photographs of the grave or at the graveside.<sup>37</sup>

Francis et al. conclude that cemeteries “exist to obscure the terrifying fact of death through ritual practice.”<sup>38</sup> Unlike in the UK, grave rights in the Netherlands are often limited to ten or twenty years. Yet in this country, slabs of hard stone that could last for centuries are put on graves only to be removed and crushed once the relatively short period is over. This costly, rhetorical gesture raises the question whether the so-called continuing bonds between the living and the dead have an expiry date.

In Denmark this seems evident in the ritualized way gravestones removed from the graves are treated. They are covered so that the names of the deceased can no longer be read [see Illustration 5]. Next, the inscribed names and dates will be removed from the stones. Thereafter, the anonymous stones may be used to strengthen the seashore. It is rather telling that when accidentally a gravestone with name and dates still on it ends up in a harbor this causes upheaval. The survivors, tracked down by journalists, tend to speak of the stone as if it were the deceased in person (for example, ‘uncle’).<sup>39</sup> In other words, as

<sup>33</sup> Field notes, Eric Venbrux, Lucerne, Switzerland, 28 March 2014.

<sup>34</sup> FRANCIS, KELLAHER & NEOPHYTOU: ‘Sustaining cemeteries’ 43. Klass speaks of the ‘need to develop some new concepts to help us understand the attachments in this kind of physical proximity’. D. KLASS: ‘Continuing conversations on continuing bonds’, in *Death Studies* 30/9 (2006) 843-858, esp. 850. We consider them to be of a religious nature (see below).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. M. MAUSS: *The Gift* (London 1970 [1925]).

<sup>36</sup> Field notes, Eric Venbrux, Lucerne, Switzerland, 31 March 2014.

<sup>37</sup> A. KJÆRSGAARD & E. VENBRUX: ‘Still in the picture: Photographs at graves and social time’, in P. BJERREGAARD, A.E. RASMUSSEN & T.F. SØRENSEN (eds.): *Materialities of passing: Explorations in transformation, transition and transience* (New York 2016) 85-109.

<sup>38</sup> FRANCIS, KELLAHER & NEOPHYTOU: *The secret cemetery* 214.

<sup>39</sup> *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, 20 March 2014, 36; *Ekstra Bladet*, 11 February 2014; *Fyens Stiftstidende*, 16 August 2012, 1, 28-29.



long as the ritual procedure of defacing the gravestone has not been undertaken the person in question appears not to be conceived of as really dead by the bereft relatives.



**Illustration 5:** Removed and covered gravestone in the old churchyard of Kolding, Denmark [photos: Anne Kjærsgaard]

### 3. ‘Becoming dead’: continuing bonds and religiosity

To Hertz we owe the insight that death is a process rather than a specific point in time.<sup>40</sup> The process of ‘becoming dead’ takes time. In the words of Humphreys:

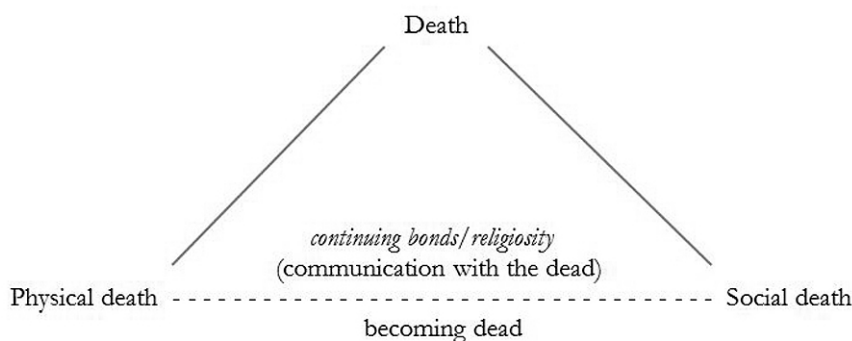
The process of dying, in its widest sense, stretches from the prognosis that a person is “terminally ill” (as opposed to being temporarily unconscious, or seriously ill, but with chances of recovery) to the complete cessation of all social actions directed towards their remains, tomb, monument or other relics representing them.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> R. HERTZ: ‘Contribution to the study of the collective representation of death’, in *Death and the right hand* (Glencoe 1960 [1907]) 25-87; M. HEESSELS & E. VENBRUX: ‘Secondary burial in the Netherlands: Rights, rites and motivations’, in *Mortality* 14/2 (2009) 119-132, esp. 120-122.

<sup>41</sup> S.C. HUMPHREYS: ‘Death and time’, in S.C. HUMPHREYS & H. KING (eds.): *Mortality and immortality: The anthropology and archaeology of death* (London 1981) 261-283, esp. 263.

Physical death is thus not perceived or experienced as the end.<sup>42</sup> The current, dominant paradigm when theorizing bereavement holds that the bereaved maintain ‘continuing bonds’ with the deceased. Over the last two decades the understanding has gained traction “that the purpose of grief is not to sever bonds with the dead, but to rework the bond in a way that the deceased can remain part of the survivor’s inner and social world”.<sup>43</sup> Grave-visiting rituals are a means for the survivors to maintain a relationship or bonds with the deceased. Following on the physical death of a loved one these ‘continuing bonds’ stave off social death. Only when continuing bonds are no longer continued the deceased may be said to have become dead in the fullest sense.

Illustration 6 represents this as a graphic:



**Illustration 6:** The process of ‘becoming dead’, the space between physical and social death, will last as long as continuing bonds between the living and the deceased are maintained. The continuing bonds entail a communication with the dead, which transcends the boundary between life and death, and, therefore, might be seen as a form of religiosity.

When bonds continue to exist between the living and the deceased, the physical death of the latter cannot be understood as the end by the living. Transcending physical death, “the limits placed on human life by the death of the body”, implies some form of religiosity.<sup>44</sup> Our point is that grave-visiting rituals offer an excellent opportunity to examine this religiosity.

Especially in prosperous and highly secularized countries, such as Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland, with limited periods of grave rest, fine-grained ethnographic studies of grave-visiting rituals can shed light on the limits

<sup>42</sup> ARIÈS: *The hour of our death* 604.

<sup>43</sup> R. GOSS & D. KLASS: *Dead but not lost: Grief narratives in religious traditions* (Walnut Grove, CA 2005) 9.

<sup>44</sup> CHIDESTER: *Patterns of transcendence* 3. Interestingly, a religious aspect comes also to the fore in the desire to be buried in a communal grave, as is increasingly popular in Switzerland, for the reason that one has company after death. A. DOMENIG & M. SAHEBI: *Wandel der Bestattungskultur in der Stadt Zürich* (Zürich 2007) 30.

of secularization. If our knowledge of death is indeed the source of religion, we might also take a fresh look at the phenomenon. In doing so we need to leave aside narrow definitions of religion and look at the actual practices and understandings of the people concerned. In this we agree with Stringer.<sup>45</sup> A closer look at the continuing bonds between the living and the deceased in grave-visiting rituals may be a good starting point.<sup>46</sup>

Grave-visiting rituals provide us with a window on religiosity that otherwise remains undetected. It would also be interesting to see when people stop visiting graves and whether the bonds with the deceased then expire or are extended by other means.<sup>47</sup> The process of 'becoming dead' may be swift or of a longer duration (more probable, it seems, in the case of an untimely death). Thorough empirical studies of grave-visiting rituals will enable us to assess how this process is intertwined with the survivors' lived religiosity. We do not claim that the grave-visiting rituals in countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland and Denmark capture all that there is to study in this respect or that all dead end up in graves, let alone that all graves will be visited, but we do claim that they reveal more about a form of religiosity thus far overlooked.

## 4. Conclusion

We have clarified that grave-visiting can be understood as ritual. We have argued that there is good reason to study grave-visiting rituals to obtain a basic

<sup>45</sup> STRINGER: 'Chatting with gran at her grave' 39; STRINGER: *Contemporary Western ethnography* 1-35. We do not think, however, that his inversion of elements of a definition of religion based on official religion is productive.

<sup>46</sup> Goss and Klass seem to agree in their latest book on continuing bonds between the living and the dead. They note, 'When we try to understand how bonds continue, and the meaning of the bonds that continue, we are in touch with something fundamental in the way individual humans make sense of their world.' GOSS & KLASS: *Dead but not lost* 7. Walter admits that 'communications with the dead can be seen as, in the broadest sense, religious experiences'. T. WALTER: 'Communicating with the dead', in C.D. BRYANT & D.L. PECK (eds.): *Encyclopedia of death and human experience*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles 2009) 216-219, esp. 219.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. KJÆRGAARD & VENBRUX: 'Still in the picture'; J. WOJTKOWIAK & E. VENBRUX: 'Private spaces for the dead: Remembrance and continuing relationships at home memorials in the Netherlands', in A. MADDRELL & J.D. SIDAWAY (eds.): *Deathscapes: Spaces for death, dying, mourning and remembrance* (Farnham 2010) 207-221; A. MADDRELL: 'Online memorials: The virtual as the new vernacular', in *Bereavement Care* 31/2 (2012) 46-54; E. KASKET: 'Continuing bonds in the age of social networking: Facebook as a modern-day medium', in *Bereavement Care* 31/2 (2012) 62-69; M. HEESSELS, F. POOTS & E. VENBRUX: 'In touch with the deceased: Animated objects and human ashes', in *Material Religion* 8/4 (2012) 466-489; N.J. JACOBY & S. REISER: 'Grief 2.0: Exploring virtual cemeteries', in T. BENSKI & E. FISHER (eds.): *Internet and emotions* (New York 2014) 103-120.

view of religiosity as practiced by people in everyday life. This is particularly true of countries assumed to be highly secularized and which have a relatively short grave tenure period.

Central to our argument is that grave-visiting rituals serve to stave off the social death of the deceased. In other words, the survivors do not perceive or experience the physical death of the deceased as an end point. We are dealing with a process of 'becoming dead' that has to be conceptualized as a phase existing between physical death and social death. During this phase the bereaved maintain bonds with the deceased by means of the grave-visiting rituals, and these bonds that transcend a physical death are invariably religious in nature.

**Anne Kjærsgaard MTH** did her PHD research at Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. As a postdoc researcher she conducts research on the nexus between funerary culture and religiosity in the School of Culture and Society, Dept. of Theology, Aarhus University, Denmark.  
E-mail: [ak@cas.au.dk](mailto:ak@cas.au.dk)

**Prof. dr. Eric Venbrux** is professor of comparative religion and director of the Centre for Thanatology at Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He specializes in death studies and has published extensively on mortuary ritual.  
E-mail: [e.venbrux@ftr.ru.nl](mailto:e.venbrux@ftr.ru.nl)