

S. Cederroth, C. Corlin, J. Lindström, eds.: *On the Meaning of Death: Essays on Mortuary Rituals and Eschatological Beliefs*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988 (Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology 8, Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Uppsaliensis, 1988). With an Introduction by Maurice Bloch. 302 pp.

This collection of essays on the social construction of death is in memory of the Swedish anthropologist Ingela Gerdin by her former colleagues and friends. The essays are all detailed anthropological studies from different, mainly, non-Western societies of how people conceptualize and cope with death. The comparative socio-cultural study of death has received a great deal of theoretical focus over the past years, and this book is a valuable contribution to the debate. The geographical breadth of the essays is impressive. There are studies from Indonesia, India, Tibet, Sri Lanka; from various African societies - including an interesting comparison between Swedish and African funeral rites by Jacobsen-Widding - and from Chile and Peru. Different aspects of death and funerals are considered in each instance, and each essay demonstrates a thoroughgoing local knowledge as well as a wide range of theoretical concerns.

In his introduction, Maurice Bloch emphasizes the emotional aspect of death. He discusses how emotionality and concept of the person are interlinked, and concludes that despite the variety in social and ritual practices encountered, the very emotional force of a death may, at a certain existential level, transcend the specificity of the social constructions of the phenomenon: "We are probably more like the Somali or the Tibetans than we pretend to be." From an ethnographic as well as from a human point of view, this book has much to recommend it. Ultimately, it is a study of the interconnectedness of religion and social practice.

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