

When I Die I Will Go to the University

A study of body donation in the Netherlands

by **Sophie Bolt**

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Inspired by the French anthropologist Robert Hertz's contributions to the sociology of death, a multidisciplinary research group, Refiguring Death Rites, at the Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands, has constructed a research project about body donation in Netherlands and Sophie Bolt, being a member of this group, has written this book as a basis of her dissertation. Sophie Bolt – a cultural anthropologist – provides significant insights into human behavior by her study on donation, motivation, death and conflict. Five out of six research chapters of the book including two appendices have already been published in precious journals like *Annals of Anatomy* or *Anatomical Sciences International*, previously.

Sophie Bolt poses the main question on the meaning attributed to the gift of bodies to the anatomical sciences by the donors, anatomical professionals and bereaved, and provides us with exciting answers about our inner mechanisms. Her analytical approach to understand the meaning-making around death and dying within body donation as a “gift-giving process” and the dynamics of giving and receiving a gift causes the reader to consider the rarely touched parts of his/her consciousness. The choice for body disposition might be saying something about people's notions of an afterlife. Giving someone's body as a gift is something so extraordinary that they have no physical or symbolic equivalent which might be causing anatomical professionals tend to receive these bodies as alienable gifts and tend to turn the bodies into study-objects. This still puts a psychological and moral

burden and leads to the unveiling of monuments for the donors and their relatives. These monuments also help the bereaved achieve the essential emotional closure for their lost ones as well as teaching the students about the value of the gift of the body donations, and to treat the donor bodies with proper respect.

The author describes the body donor as independent, strong and self-determined, motivated by their desire to be useful after death for the advance of medical education and to make a contribution to medical science. The context of body donation in Netherlands is also described in detail with comparisons from the EU countries and also Turkey. The book also includes acknowledgements and summary part in Dutch language.

I can recommend this book especially to anatomical professionals as well as body donors and bereaved as it puts forward strong arguments to the complex and dynamic nature of human behavior concerning donation, motivation, death and conflicts on these issues.

Review by Erdoğan Şendemir

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