

## Repaying the debts of the dead:

Kinship, microfinance, and mortuary practice on the Paraguayan frontier

### Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Tuesday 10 May 2016, 4.15 – 5.30pm

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#### Speaker

**Dr Caroline Schuster, Australian National University**

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HRC Conference Rm 128, A.D. Hope Bldg 14, ANU



Microcredit loans—most famously systems of group-based borrowing to enhance women's entrepreneurship—are a key tool in global economic development frameworks. Building outward from microcredit programs in Paraguay I explore the discontinuous materialities of both kin- and debt-based obligations, especially at their intersection. I argue that borrowers felt debts' lifespans most acutely when mortuary practices anchored in kinship ties were bound up with the practical task of shouldering financial obligations of the dead. I document how the three-way link between kinship, death, and indebtedness goes beyond analogy; collective debt is not simply "like" a relationship of kinship. Instead, microcredit social collateral offers a powerful context for people to grapple with the broader question of lifespan, and the life-and-death human stakes of obligation.

**Caroline Schuster** is a Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Australian National University researching debt, development, and gender in Latin America. Her recent book, *Social Collateral: Women and Microfinance in Paraguay's smuggling economy* tracks the politics of interdependency in debt relations.

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#### Enquiries

[Colette.Gilmour@anu.edu.au](mailto:Colette.Gilmour@anu.edu.au)

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