<Book Review>

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Reviewed by Amy Rothschild*

In *The Unruly Dead: Spirits, Memory, and State Formation in Timor-Leste*, Lia Kent discusses how various Timorese actors, including families, NGOs, veterans' groups, activists, and state agents, have been responding to the massive "bad" (violent or untimely) death that occurred during the Indonesian occupation of 1975–99 by engaging in various types of "memory work." This includes commemoration, memorialization, monument building, exhumation, reburial, and care for the dead. A central argument of this book is that we must take the dead seriously as active participants in this work—and thus in processes of post-conflict recovery and repair in Timor-Leste more generally. Just as the Timorese who survived the occupation have been "*working with* their memories of the dead" as they seek to rebuild their lives, the dead have been "*working on* the living" as the living encounter human remains, the restless and unhappy spirits of those whose bodies have not yet been recovered, and the charged and dangerous landscapes within which these remains and/or restless spirits reside (p. 5). Notably, there is a dialectical relationship at play here: the dead, through their "material and spectral legacies," both animate and are animated by the memory work of the living (p. 7).

The Unruly Dead examines this dialectical relationship. It emphasizes how memory work that attempts to exclude, contain, control, or otherwise employ the dead for various instrumental purposes is continuously disrupted by the experienced agency of the "unruly" deceased. Relevant context here includes the combination of the scale and manner of bad death in Timor-Leste, as well as long-standing cultural beliefs in Timor-Leste about the dead. Regarding the former, the scale was enormous: well over 100,000 Timorese out of a pre-invasion population of approximately 650,000 died during the occupation. Due, among other things, to the fact that many Timorese died isolated deaths in remote, rural areas in the early years of the occupation as a result of starvation and disease, the location of many bodies is still unknown.[1)]

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Regarding questions of culture, as Kent explains, in Timor-Leste, as in many parts of the world,

> death is not a final event or simply a physiological phenomenon but a social process that requires the dead to be eased from the world of the living . . . into another realm, in this case the realm of the ancestors. (p. 7)

Mortuary rituals are fundamental to this transition. After these rituals, the dead and the living maintain an ongoing reciprocal relationship: the living care for the dead by regularly visiting their graves and conversing with them; the dead care for the living by providing them with protection and assistance (p. 8). The scale of bad death in Timor-Leste, and the reality of so many still-missing bodies, has thus profoundly complicated a critical sociocultural process of regeneration. The result has been chaos and disorder, as the dead haunt the living (p. 8). Via channels such as dreams and spirit possession, the dead—particularly the unhappy, restless spirits of those whose bodies have not yet been recovered—demand that the living fulfill their ethical responsibilities of care toward them, responsibilities which include the provision of proper burial.

Yet if some Timorese have been engaged in memory work such as looking for and reburying the dead with the primary goals of fulfilling familial responsibilities and enfolding the dead back into kinship networks and the local community (p. 10), *The Unruly Dead* makes clear that other actors have been engaged in memory work for different and more blatantly instrumental purposes. Here, Kent brings in the concept of necro-governmentality. Kent describes this term, which brings together J.-A. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, as a form of necropolitics or power which involves employing the dead—treated as inert, passive objects and "assigned to the temporality of the past" (p. 62)—to exert control over the living.

In Chapter 1, Kent lays out the necro-governmental logics guiding Timor-Leste's state in its crafting of a narrative of past heroic resistance to Indonesian rule, a narrative intended to consolidate the state and craft ideal citizens (p. 32). Kent argues that the state has incorporated some of the dead into this narrative, and thus into the realm of the state, through the assignment of martyr subjectivities. Created, among other means, via an elaborate state-led program that valorizes living and deceased veterans of Timor-Leste's resistance movement with pensions and medals, the martyr subjectivity has resulted in the construction of hierarchies of the dead (p. 35). The subjectivity has been applied to members of Timor-Leste's formal resistance movement, particularly males, armed guerrilla fighters, and the older generation; it has not been applied to deceased civilians, women, children, or those killed by Timor-Leste's resistance movement. Kent terms these latter groups the "inconvenient dead."

The author explains that while the state's necro-governmental technologies and logics (logics which have been shaped in dialogue with other forms of necro-governmentality, such as those linked with projects of transitional justice) are powerful, working to shape the discourses and practices of non-state actors, they are not all-encompassing. Rather, these logics are transformed as they "intersect unevenly with alternative logics of necro-governmentality and other forms of power," including the power of the dead to act upon and make demands upon the living (p. 44). Put differently, moments of intersection or friction between the necro-governmental logics deployed by state and non-state actors and the dead themselves are ultimately productive. They contribute to debate about questions of suffering, sacrifice, reward, and national belonging (p. 157); they also contribute to the creation of new communities, new spaces of memory, and new social and political practices, including new ways of caring for the dead.

Kent notes that these dynamics of friction and transformation—and the power of the dead to make demands upon the living—become more apparent as one moves farther away from the state and the state's capital of Dili. Indeed, the book's main ethnographic chapters, with each focusing on a particular category of the dead (and the interactions of the dead with various necro-governmental logics and projects), follow this trajectory from the state outward. Chapter 2 discusses the young members of the clandestine arm of Timor-Leste's resistance movement who were killed in the Santa Cruz massacre in Dili in 1991; Chapter 3 turns to civilians killed in the 1999 Liquica Church massacre in the town of Liquica (a 45-minute drive west of Dili); Chapter 4 examines the "dispersed dead" who died of starvation and disease in the first few years of the occupation in remote areas in the mountains and forests (Kent focuses on the subdistrict of Natarbora in the municipality of Manatututu, about a three-hour drive from Dili); finally, Chapter 5 focuses on the "treacherous dead," Timorese who were killed by Timor-Leste's resistance forces, either for being deemed "reactionaries" or for being members of competing political parties.[2)] (Kent focuses on numerous sites of killing outside of Dili.)

As the author makes clear, the distance from the state is more than geographic: while those killed during the Santa Cruz massacre have come to be incorporated into the state's heroic narrative as martyrs (despite their younger age and engagement in clandestine as opposed to armed resistance), the other three groups of dead have largely been excluded from this narrative. Accordingly, the demands of the groups differ. While the spirits of the Santa Cruz dead welcome the state's annual commemorations of the event, they deem these insufficient. They "demand to be treated as more than just abstract symbols of youth martyrdom . . . they also want their bodies recovered and to have individualized, ritual treatment from their kin" (p. 66). Meanwhile, the three groups of "inconvenient dead" that are the focus of Chapters 3, 4, and 5 demand not only to be remembered within their kinship networks but also to be remembered and officially recognized as martyrs by the state. The book examines how the latter demands have contributed to the slow expansion in Timor-Leste of the state's category of mar-

tyr (p. 117).

Based on twenty years of work and ethnographic research in Timor-Leste, *The Unruly Dead* provides an invaluable empirical case study of how a particular society is attempting to reckon with a history of violence and massive bad death. Though its theoretical density at times may be difficult for some to navigate, this is a fascinating book that is relevant to a wide range of scholars and practitioners interested in interrelated questions of peacebuilding, post-conflict recovery and repair, transitional justice, memory, and state formation. The book is a particular must-read for those interested in exploring these questions in Timor-Leste or in other Southeast Asian countries marked by legacies of bad death.

One main contribution of *The Unruly Dead* is the book's focus and emphasis on the agency of the dead. Among other things, the book's central insight—that the dead in Timor-Leste are political and social actors in their own right—works to unsettle key assumptions of Western transitional justice frameworks, frameworks that have been implemented on the ground in Timor-Leste, particularly in the immediate post-independence period, with mixed results (see Cohen 2006; Huang and Gunn 2006; Kent 2012). While transitional justice frameworks assume that the living demand justice on behalf of the dead, *The Unruly Dead* makes clear that the dead claim justice for themselves. While transitional justice frameworks assume justice is achieved through legal or legal-adjacent mechanisms linked with the state, such as trials, material reparations, or official apologies, *The Unruly Dead* shows us that the dead often demand different kinds of actions, from different, non-state actors. Finally, transitional justice frameworks operate with a linear model of justice that assumes that through various actions the past can be settled or put away; Kent's work makes clear that at least in Timor-Leste, attempts to re-enfold the dead within networks of kin and community "[have] a fragile, restless, and contingent quality" and are never fully complete (pp. 149–150). The dead—particularly those whose bodies have not yet been recovered—remain troubling spirits that remind the living and the state that "the violence of the Indonesian occupation is not firmly in the past but remains a potent presence in the present" (p. 151).

The Unruly Dead provides a compelling in-depth exploration of how the dead shape the living in post-conflict societies. Through meticulous ethnography conducted with a wide range of state and non-state actors, as well as astute analysis that fluently spans anthropology, law, and politics, Kent challenges and pushes the boundaries of conventional understandings of justice, memory, reconciliation, and belonging. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the ways in which the past endures in the present, as well as the complex ways that communities navigate loss and attempt to build new futures.

Notes

1) Also relevant here, as Kent discusses, is the limited amount of attention that Timor-Leste's post-independence state has devoted to locating missing bodies (p. 62).
2) The latter killings took place mainly in the brief civil war preceding the occupation.

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