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Lia Kent's The Unruly Dead is a concise, elegantly written ethnography that takes seriously the proposition that the dead act in the world. The author has conducted research in Timor-Leste for more than two decades, and this new book draws on multi-sited fieldwork carried out between 2015 and 2019. It traces how human remains, restless spirits, and the practices of care they call forth shape post-conflict politics far beyond official memorials and transitional justice programs. Kent reorients debates in peacebuilding and memory studies by showing that what are termed "bad deaths" from the Indonesian occupation—violent, premature, and often unburied—continue to generate demands, obligations, and affiliations that destabilize state projects of closure.

The book advances four interconnected arguments. First, the dead are not passive symbols but political actors whose agency is both material and spectral: bones, graves, and landscapes draw the living into searches, reburials, rituals, and public claims; spirits visit in dreams, demand proper care, and unsettle attempts to contain them. Second, Kent theorizes a shift from necropower (rule through death under the Indonesian occupation) to a "necro-governmentality" in independent Timor-Leste: a mode of power that governs through care, categorization, and the incorporation of the dead into a national narrative. This mode is neither total nor monopolized by the state; it is variously enacted by ministries, veterans' groups, NGOs, and local committees, and is continually negotiated from below. Third, vernacular memory work—indigenous forensics, ritual expertise, family care—both exceeds and transforms technocratic, statist frameworks, prompting mechanisms for identifying the dead to expand in locally recognized ways. Finally, Kent argues that the "unruly dead" require that the past remain open, generating ongoing renegotiations: absent bodies and restless spirits obstruct linear transition narratives and insist on sustained ethical and political labor.

Empirically, the chapters are richly ethnographic. Chapter 1 maps the evolution from Indonesian necropower to post-independence necro-governmentality, demonstrating the limits of national ceremonies such as the *Kore Metan Nasional* (a Timorese state ceremony lifting mourning, honoring martyrs, and shaping national memory) in the face of thousands of unrecovered bodies, locally powerful spiritual worlds, and the state's weak presence beyond Dili. Chapter 2 revisits the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre to show how iconic national commemoration coexists with unresolved demands for proper burial. Kent's account of tensions and accommodations between international forensic teams and local ritual experts—families seeking ancestral permissions; "traditional DNA testing" (*koko ran*) alongside laboratory tests; and the emergence of "citizen forensics"—is outstanding, illuminating inventive epistemic pluralism rather than a simple clash between science and culture. Chapter 3 focuses on the Liquiçá church massacre, tracing the shifting subjectivities of the dead—from victims to martyrs—through new spaces such as the Garden of Heroes and the church's Angel memorial. Here, Kent deftly shows how sacralized places "cool" dangerous deathscapes while becoming stages where families, widows, veterans, clergy, and officials negotiate the

meaning of sacrifice and the limits of heroic recognition. Chapter 4 follows local commissions (notably in Natarbora) that have recovered thousands of dispersed remains and curated "mini-museums" of lulik objects. This "archive of remains" compels the state to respond and expands the category of martyr beyond armed men to include the participatory populace—women, children, and civilian supporters—quietly rewriting the moral geography of resistance. Chapter 5 addresses the "unmournable" dead—those labeled traitors or collaborators, including victims of FRETILIN violence and RENAL prisons. Through commemorations, exhumations, and reconciliations that deploy a "cultural logic of exteriority" (*ema ki'ik vs. ema bo'ot* / unimportant versus important people), communities partially bring a "public secret" to light, achieving partial rehabilitations and exposing the limits of elite willingness to confront intra-resistance harms.

The book's strengths are considerable. Conceptually, Kent's articulation of necro-governmentality, informed by its entanglement with local modes of existence, offers a persuasive way to hold together the different ways of being-in-the-world that converge in the treatment of the dead at multiple levels (scientific practice, international and national politics, and local and family political articulations, among others). It collapses hierarchies that privilege Western analytics over non-Western ontologies and examines how things are, in fact, produced in the local practices she accompanies. Methodologically, her careful, long-term ethnography—attentive to dreams, emotions, ritual textures, and the micropolitics of commemoration—enables a rare account of how the agency of the dead is experienced and operationalized in everyday life. Politically, Kent makes visible state constraints and ambitions without caricature; she elevates families' care work and widows' leadership; and she shows how veterans' groups simultaneously reproduce and reconfigure official narratives. The discussion of the promises and pitfalls of forensic humanitarianism—especially the consequences of partial exhumations and the geopolitics of which bodies receive attention—offers a nuanced critique of great value to practitioners.

The contributions of Kent's work are significant. For anthropology, Kent consolidates an emerging literature on the politics of the dead with a theoretically generative and empirically rich case. For peace and conflict studies, she challenges teleologies of transition and closure, proposing frameworks that accommodate ongoing obligations to the dead and an open-ended recovery process. For memory and heritage studies, her attention to vernacular practices—local commissions, mini-museums, widows' groups, grassroots rituals—expands the map beyond monumentalism and beyond national or international frames. For forensic practice, the book advances a pragmatic pluralism: scientific methods gain legitimacy and effectiveness when braided with local ritual authority, and "care" must include accompaniment after exhumation, not merely technical identification.

Kent offers a sober and deeply human portrait of how the dead continue to intervene in the social and political life of Timor-Leste. Without idealizing the state or romanticizing the vernacular, she depicts a dense set of actants —families, widows, veterans, clergy,

officials, and spirits—where care, identification, and commemoration are continually negotiated. Her proposal for pragmatic pluralism does not resolve the past; it keeps it productively open, inviting institutions and communities to accompany, rather than foreclose, the demands of the dead. The result is an enduring contribution to thinking about memory, justice, and belonging beyond the pursuit of closure.

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