The Dead as Ancestors, Martyrs,
and Heroes in Timor-Leste

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Preface

The Dead, the State, and the People in Timor-Leste

Elizabeth G. Traube

This volume, the editors write in their Introduction, 'aims to shed light on the myriad ways in which the dead – especially those who died during the occupation – matter to the living'. In successfully realising that aim, the volume provides a thick ethnographic analysis of how death rituals have become a site of struggle in post-independence Timor-Leste, a contested terrain where participants from different social positions play out overlapping conceptions of the past and the future.

In both pre- and post-independence Timor-Leste societies, ritual treatment of the dead is a cosmological as well as a social concern. Mortuary ceremonies weave together two sets of obligations: those of the living to the dead, and those among the living; the latter include the obligations of house members to assist one another in honouring their dead relatives, and formal prestation obligations between allied groups established through marriages. At the mortuary ceremonies I attended in early 1970s Aileu, in what was then Portuguese Timor, Mambai described all material gifts offered in mortuary ceremonies, whether the animal sacrifices made to the spirits of the deceased or the livestock exchanged between marital allies, as 'paying for the fatigue of the dead' (*seul maeta ni kolen*). *Kole*, fatigue, tiredness, refers to states of exhaustion incurred in life-giving activities, and its repayment can have the sense of a 'wage' (Traube 2007). Paying the dead their wages took time. Death was not a momentary event but a lengthy process, structured by a series of ceremonies that began with the burial and concluded months, or more often years later, with ceremonies to 'dispatch' (*toil*) the dead to their final resting place.[1] In the interval, people said, the

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1   In Mambai eschatology, the final destination of the dead is across the sea, where they undergo a decisive transformation, the precise nature of which the living can never know. In other Timorese cultures, mortuary rituals conclude with the final emplacement of the dead in the land, an idea evoked by Mambai conception that a long sojourn on the mountain of origins

dead linger near the living – as protective ancestors, if satisfied with the honours they have received, or raiding the gardens in the form of 'wild' spirits, if they feel neglected. Performing burial and post-burial ceremonies maintained the proper balance between the living and the dead at the same time as they organised the alliance relations among the living.

Dispatch ceremonies were the largest scale of any performance, as several men from one lineage house (or agnatically related houses) would usually band together to dispatch their dead relatives in one ceremony, to which each would summon his own wife-takers and wife-givers. At times, the intense sociality of the exchange transactions among marital allies seemed to me discordant with the gravity of the debt to the dead. Mambai themselves would describe mortuary ceremonies as occasions where participants 'argued over goats and pigs' (the conventional prestation items expected from wife-takers and wife-givers, respectively), and would ruefully concede that the often acrimonious atmosphere 'made one's head ache' (*fun aim klutan ban*). Material as well as moral interests were stake in these events. Skilled negotiators could 'win' (*manan*), that is, emerge from a ceremony with a surplus of 'live water buffalo' (*arabau-morin*) after having honoured the dead and feasted the guests with the sacrificial gifts of 'dead water buffalo' (*arabau-maten*). Symbolic profits, however, were critical. Feast-givers enhanced their prestige by honouring the dead, while in repaying their debts to marital allies they secured the conditions for renewing alliances.

While each region had its own particular ways of honouring the dead, the high stakes Mambai attributed to the process were typical of pre-occupation ritual life. Indonesian policies imposed during the occupation severely disrupted collective ritual performances. The Indonesian authorities displaced populations, restricted travel, limited the size of gatherings, and monitored material transactions. Ritual life went on, but its temporal rhythms, social locations, and scales were all upset, and the ramifications were profound, both for social relations and for the balance between the human realm and that of the non-human, to which the dead belong. While the Indonesian policies affected collective rituals of all types, funerals faced additional obstacles. The bodies of many combatants killed in battle were either never recovered, or, along with those of countless civilians who died of hunger and disease, were disposed of hastily, often far from home, with minimal rites; in addition, there were all those who had 'disappeared'. On Timor, violent or sudden deaths – 'red deaths' – are inauspicious; in ordinary times, these

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precedes the final journey across the seas (see Traube 1986). What they have in common is the idea of a lengthy process that leads eventually to some form of decisive separation.

'bad deaths' necessitate prompt ritual treatment to transform the disoriented and potentially vengeful spirits of the deceased into benevolent ancestors. The lack of proper ceremony during the occupation thus compounded the dangers posed by the sheer numbers of bad deaths that occurred. In the post-independence period, recovering and reburying remains, as well as holding secondary treatments without actual remains and repairing graves, have emerged as matters of intense concern. In retrospect, we might see the pronounced concern observed across Timor-Leste with rebuilding origin houses in the immediate wake of the Indonesian withdrawal (McWilliam 2005) as preparation for holding mortuary ceremonies for those who died during the occupation.

Social relations, statuses, and prestige are certainly at stake in the revival of mortuary ceremonies across the country. Nevertheless, the social dislocations of the occupation and the efforts to reconstitute local social arrangements should not obscure the deep disquiet aroused by the perceived presence of the dead themselves. As Feijó and Kent observe: 'The restless, unburied dead remain dangerous, to their descendants and to the nation'. In the post-independence period, as the abundance that many had expected to come with nationhood has failed to materialise, these concerns have mounted. The contributors to this volume document a deepening sense of the negative presence of the dead, who manifest their anger by afflicting the living with individual and collective misfortunes. As Damian Grenfell cogently observes in his chapter, 'there are more spirits to appease, and their appeasement is more important, at the same time as there are fewer resources available to do so'.

Into this charged situation, the new nation state has inserted itself. Attending to the dead, as this volume elucidates, is as much a matter of national as local politics. Susana de Matos Viegas's chapter on the dynamics of 'ancestorship' in Timorese societies identifies those who died in the resistance struggle as a special, historically emergent category of ancestors, the 'martyrs and heroes' who gave their lives for the nation and await thanks from the living. When I first returned to Aileu in 2000, the association between death and nationhood was strong, but the terms 'martyr' and 'hero' were less common than they have since become. Nor were people disposed to distinguish some ways of dying for the nation from others. My Mambai interlocutors certainly honoured the sacrifices made by Falantil combatants, as well as the risks that members of the clandestine movement had incurred. Most often, however, speakers represented the resistance struggle as having been waged by 'women and men' (*hina nor maena*), Bi Bere and Mau Bere, or simply *povo*, the people. 'The people', speakers declared, had 'purchased'

the nation 'with their blood and their bones' and now awaited 'payment for their fatigue', the 'wages' due to them from the state (Traube 2007). Certain official discourses concur with this inclusive construction. The narrative of *funu*, Michael Leach observes in this volume, recounts the struggle of a united people, and Amy Rothschild similarly notes that all Timorese alive during the occupation are heroes, in one discourse. Such inclusiveness, however, has become more exception than rule, at least in official political discourses and symbolic practices. Within what Leach calls a 'political economy of recognition', some contributions to the independence struggle are valorised over others: military combatants over clandestine members, and both of these over civilian 'victims'. The inequality is instantiated in the state's involvement in the reburial and commemoration of those who belong to the narrowly defined category of martyrs.

At issue is not only whom the state honours but also how they do so. New state-sponsored national ceremonies reserved for 'martyrs' are located away from villages, in national cemeteries built in Metinaro and other district centres, administrative spaces that Timorese, I suspect, would classify as 'outside' and 'light', in contrast to the dark, enclosed, inner realm of customary rites (Traube 2019). In contrast to both Catholic and customary graveyards, burial in these new spaces physically separates the dead from their families, making it difficult for relatives to perform such traditional practices of care as lighting candles or laying flowers on the grave. From the state's perspective, this is no accident. The dead themselves are secondary to, if not absent from, state rituals to honour 'martyrs', and caring for the dead is not these rituals' purpose. Damian Grenfell makes this point with clarity and force in his chapter. State funerals and memorials, he argues, and the 'liberal peace' they envision, are about the living rather than the dead. In this construction of the debt owed to the dead, the central obligation incumbent on the living is to remember them. Although the dead are its objects, the activity of remembering serves the living, who ideally produce themselves as citizens of the nation in thinking about those who died. Within the animist ontologies that inform customary rituals, the dead expect less abstract forms of attention: they expect the living to care for them, to instantiate remembrance in concrete acts. In this approach, which resonates with the Catholic majority as well as with followers of the indigenous religions, the dead are agents whose goodwill is essential to the future wellbeing of their descendants and of the nation. This theme recurs throughout the volume: whatever else mortuary ceremonies do, in the eyes of many Timorese, they need to reciprocate those who gave their lives in the struggle and so secure and maintain a proper 'balance' between

the living and the dead. For this, the living must recognise the dead as full participants in any rites held in their name.

As I read the chapters, at issue in the conflicts over where and how to bury the dead and how long to mourn them is the nature and extent of the new state's role in ceremonial life. Ricardo Roque (2010) has established the importance of ceremony in colonial governance. Portuguese colonial authorities ignored or disparaged overtly animistic rituals, including customary funerals, but as Roque shows in detail, they were very attentive to the ceremonies of jural affairs, into which they inserted themselves. They surrounded themselves and their interactions with the populace with ceremonial etiquette and symbolism, raising and lowering flags, distributing sceptres, and displaying assorted regalia of office that embodied the sacred power of the outside world (Traube 2019). Indeed, Christopher Shepherd (2019) has argued that over the course of the early twentieth century, overseas foreigners absorbed qualities associated with indigenous spirits and effectively displaced them as powerful beings. That is, as the balance of power shifted from ritual authorities to political executives (local as well as colonial), colonial authorities, Shepherd argues, assumed qualities of sacredness and danger formerly embodied by spirits (280). This argument, to my mind, is provocative but overstated, and I would suggest that the contemporary reluctance of the dead to make do with state-sponsored ceremonies underscores the enduring gap between political leaders and the spirit world. It should be emphasised that the new national leadership is much more closely related to the spirits they actively seek to represent than were Portuguese colonials. Many members of the new government were military combatants themselves, like the 'martyrs' they have singled out for honours, so that in celebrating the military dead, they are also celebrating their own role in making the nation (see Grenfell in this volume). From this perspective, national leaders, like Portuguese colonials before them, are seeking to use political ceremony to legitimise their rule. If so, the many Timorese who insist on a wider, more inclusive definition of 'martyrs and heroes', one that includes civilian as well as military dead, would seem to be resisting any simple homology between living political leaders and the spirits of those who died for the nation. Rather, as I have argued elsewhere (Traube 2011), customary ritual leaders and the spirit world for which they care are homologous with the broad category of *povu*, 'the people', the suffering 'women and men' of the resistance struggle. The state's masculinist rhetoric ignores a simple but pervasive premise of Timorese thought, that life giving is always dependent on the union of female and male. The united nation that won the war, the 'old mother, old father', expects recompense from the new state it birthed.

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Introduction

Martyrs, Ancestors and Heroes: The Multiple Lives of Dead Bodies in Independent Timor-Leste

Lia Kent and Rui Graça Feijó

Abstract

This introductory chapter considers the diverse ways in which dead influence the living in the new nation-state of Timor-Leste. We argue that experiences of acute suffering, loss, dislocation, and protracted struggle are intensified by the spiritual dangers posed by the vast numbers of missing or unburied bodies and disrupted mortuary rituals. We consider how deceased beings perceived as 'ancestors' are thought to hold the capacity to influence the lives of the living. We also examine how the dead – especially those designated heroes or martyrs – are manipulated by the living to achieve certain aims. We argue that, because the dead continue to profoundly shape relationships amongst families, communities, and the nation-state, they must be understood as pivotal to ongoing processes of nation and state formation.

Keywords: the dead, mortuary rituals, ancestors, martyrs, heroes, nation-building

Over a century ago, Robert Hertz (1881-1915), a young French scholar, wrote a seminal article entitled 'A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representations of Death' (Hertz 1960 [1907]), in which he formulated an idea that has since become a critical *topos* in the social sciences. For Hertz, death has a double face: on the one hand, it is a physiological event that strikes individuals and removes them from the world of the living; on the other, it is a social and cultural phenomenon. As Hertz wrote:

> Where a human being is concerned, the physiological phenomena are not the whole of death. To the organic event is added a complex mass of

beliefs, emotions and activities which give it its distinctive character. [...]
Death has a special meaning for social consciousness; it is the object of
collective representations. (1960, 27-28)

While physiological or biological death is generally a discrete, timebound
event, social death is often a prolonged process. This is because, as Laqueur
(elaborating on Hertz's ideas), writes, the dead are 'social beings': as such
they 'need to be eased out of this world and safely settled into the next and
into memory' (Laqueur 2015, 10). The requirements of this settling-in process
vary according to historical, cultural and social factors. They often involve
the transformation of the identity of the dead into some other form – for
instance an ancestor – or their initiation into an afterlife, or into nothing.

Regardless of their culturally specific form, the social aspects of death
create obligations for relatives of the deceased and other acquaintances, who
want the dead body to be cared for and to be in the right 'place' (Kaufman
2016). That this is the case in societies around the globe underscores the
degree to which the abandoned, desecrated or uncared-for body is almost
universally regarded as 'unbearable' to the living (Laqueur 2015, 8), as 'an
affront to the moral order' (Kaufman 2016). Because the dead matter so
much to the living, they cannot be left to themselves. They demand the
attention of, and actions by, the living. They suffer the burden of decisions
made by those who feel empowered to take them – among them families,
governments, and religious and communal authorities – regarding how
they should be remembered and into what identities they should be socially
transformed.

The idea that death is a protracted process of social transformation
rather than a self-contained event resonates in contemporary Timor-Leste.
Anthropological scholarship has generated rich insights regarding the role
of mortuary rituals in reconstituting social life and of the obligations of
the living to the dead (see Traube 1986; McWilliam 2008, 2011; Hicks 2004;
Grenfell 2012, 2015; Bovensiepen 2014, 2018; Viegas 2019.) East Timorese
mortuary rituals are not confined to what we might imagine to be a nuclear
family or a close kin network but, rather, involve extended kin networks
and other social networks. They are also not discrete events but entail
ongoing obligations in the form of periodic visits to gravesites to lay flowers,
light candles, offer prayers, and communicate with the dead, either on
special days (2 November is the Catholic ritual day dedicated to the dead)
or at important junctures in the life of the deceased's family (see Viegas
2019). Mortuary rituals, like marriage rituals (with which they are closely
connected), must also be seen as part of the life cycle: as part of an ongoing

process of reciprocity and exchange that works to reassert, reproduce and recalibrate social and status relations (Bovensiepen 2014, 113). In a context where the dead are thought to possess the power to influence the lives of the living, these rituals are critical to well-being.

While death in 'ordinary' circumstances presents an onerous enough set of obligations for East Timorese families, these obligations are magnified in a context where many died in 'unnatural' or violent circumstances. The precise number of those who died as a consequence of the 24-year Indonesian occupation is unknown. Based on its truth-seeking work and sophisticated demographic analysis, the Commission for Truth, Reception and Reconciliation (Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste/CAVR) estimates that, at a minimum, 102,800 (+/- 12,000) deaths may be attributed to the occupation, of which 18,600 were due to direct killing and 84,200 were due to hunger and illness (CAVR 2005, Part 6.3). While this figure is now widely cited in Timor-Leste studies, the actual figure is likely to be much higher given the difficulties of accounting for the substantial number of people who died during the 1970s, many of whom were not buried in properly marked graves (see Rothschild in this volume; Roosa 2007, 576). Even the CAVR considered that the same data could yield a higher figure of 186,000 deaths and admitted that figures in excess of 200,000 – as claimed by international organisations such as the International Committee on the Red Cross – should not be discarded.

A vast number of people died during the early years of the occupation, between 1975 and 1980. In this period, many civilians lived in the mountains in territories controlled by FRETILIN.[1] While this offered some protection from Indonesian forces, thousands perished from aerial bombardments (as the military attempted to separate civilians from the Resistance) or from starvation and disease due to the destruction of food sources. The circumstances in which people died often did not permit the performance of the required death rituals. The displacement and military operations that were features of everyday life meant that bodies were hastily buried in makeshift bush graves or simply abandoned to decompose. Those who remained in their villages fared little better, and 'entire families, even entire neighbourhoods perished at that time', again due to starvation, disease and aerial bombardments (Roosa 2007, 575). Others were 'disappeared' by the Indonesian authorities, their bodies thrown into the sea, down wells or deep valleys, or burned. Many bodies have not been recovered.

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1   *Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente* (The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor).

This edited collection is informed by our experiences of working in Timor-Leste since national independence was achieved in 2002.[2] Over this period, we have been struck by the considerable time, energy and resources that ordinary East Timorese are devoting to the rehabilitation of graves, the recovery of human remains, and secondary burials of those who perished during the Indonesian occupation. This is especially remarkable in a context where a significant percentage of the population lives in long-term, structural poverty. Both of us have engaged in enquiries into these practices, which are particularly noticeable in the case of the bodies of those deemed to be 'martyrs': those perceived to have died directly or indirectly due to their participation in the struggle for national liberation. We have also been intrigued by the profusion of state-sanctioned efforts to memorialise, recognise and rebury those popularly regarded as 'heroes' of the national resistance struggle as part of a process of constructing a new national identity and projecting the legitimacy of the state. This collection aims to shed light on myriad ways in which the dead – especially those who died during the occupation – matter to the living. Recognising that these issues must be examined from multiple angles and utilising diverse disciplinary frameworks, the following chapters are written by political scientists, scholars of international studies, peacebuilding and development, and anthropologists. They variously explore what the recovery, reburial, and honouring of the conflict-dead accomplishes politically, socially, culturally, and in terms of familial well-being. In these explorations, the multiple 'lives' of the dead as martyrs, ancestors and heroes, and the complex relationships between these lives, is brought to the fore.

In the remainder of this introduction, we provide a brief historical background to the emergence of Timor-Leste as a nation state. We then set out a broad framework within which the issue of the relationships between martyrs, ancestors, and national heroes will be addressed in the individual chapters. The key theme we wish to draw out here is that the dead possess a power or a potency, which gives them a central role to play in animating political, social, and cultural life. We briefly discuss two different yet intertwined ways in which the power of the dead can be envisaged. First, we examine how deceased beings perceived as 'ancestors' are thought to have the capacity to influence the lives of living communities. Second, we turn our attention to how the dead – especially those designated heroes or

2   Most of the chapters in this collection use the official name *Timor-Leste* to refer to the post-2002 nation state and *East Timor* when referring to the pre-2002 territory. *East Timorese* is employed as the demonym throughout.

martyrs of national liberation – can be manipulated by the living to obtain certain goals. We conclude by focusing on the Timor-Leste government's flawed *Kore Metan Nasional* (National End of Mourning) initiative, which underscores the degree to which efforts to manipulate, manage or otherwise contain the powerful dead have thus far not proven entirely successful.

The emergence of modern Timor-Leste

The most relevant event in the modern history of Timor-Leste was the restoration of its independence. At midnight on 20 May 2002, Xanana Gusmão, the leader of the Resistance and president-elect, raised the flag of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in the presence of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the presidents of Portugal (Jorge Sampaio) and Indonesia (Megawati Sukarnoputri), and former US president Bill Clinton, and a vast crowd that assembled in Tasi Tolu, on the outskirts of Dili. Unlike the short-lived proclamation of independence made by FRETILIN political leaders on 28 November 1975, which was a gesture of despair with very little echo in the international arena, this time the event was greeted as a symbol of hope for a peaceful development. Soon the territory was accepted as the 202nd member of the United Nations and recognised by almost every country in the world.

Located in the Lesser Sundas group of islands in maritime Southeast Asia, close to the north shore of Australia, Timor-Leste occupies the eastern part of an island; it has an area of 15,000 square kilometres and a population that is now around 1.2 million. The island has been inhabited for over 40,000 years. The first migrants came from the east, that is, from Papua. Around 1500 BCE, a new wave of migrants came from the north – the Taiwanese Austronesians – who are the ancestors of most of the island's population and their different languages (Hull 2002; Durand 2006). The Portuguese arrived around 1515, trailing the Chinese merchants who introduced them to the wealth of Timor after the Portuguese conquest of Malacca, a critical trading knot between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific and the China Sea. At that time, there seems not to have existed any form of central authority over the island. With the Portuguese came the encounter with Christianity, the first of the major religions of the world to establish a presence on the island, which, unlike most of the Indonesian archipelago, had hitherto been untouched by Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus.

Only in 1703 did the Europeans set a permanent political and administrative basis in Timor – Lifau (nowadays, in the exclave of Oecussi). From

then on, power in the land was not only derived from ancestral origins and exercised by local rulers, but also emerged from the interplay between a native people and foreigners who possessed the means of domination. This interplay was not always peaceful, and over the centuries several episodes of dispute and conflict took place (Durand 2011; Kammen 2015). The aim of European colonialism was not limited to the extraction of resources. It comprehended a 'civilising mission' to impose deep changes in the colony's way of life and vernacular culture. On the one hand, it was supposed to deliver material improvements (schools, health care), which in the case of 'Portuguese Timor' were quite feeble in comparison to other colonial domains. On the other hand, it purported to 'convert' the colonised to new social norms of behaviour and it suppressed manifestations of local culture regarded as forms of 'primitivism'. Catholic missionaries, for instance, attempted to eradicate what they perceived to be a 'fear of the dead' amongst the Timorese, even if these attempts did not always have their desired effect (Bovensiepen and Rosa 2016, 676; see also Viegas 2016; Rosa 2019.)

Debates over the value of vernacular culture permeated the proto-nationalist movement that emerged in Dili in the early 1970s (Araújo 2012; Silva 2019). For many of its young supporters, nationalism ought to be defended as the right of the Timorese to maintain their cultural values and practices, which were being attacked by the colonisers imbued with notions of 'progress'. Others would present a different view on the role of the nationalist movement: to overcome centuries of 'backwardness' imposed by the colonisers, whose hunger for extracting resources was held to have overwhelmed any serious commitment to investing in 'development'. Those who represented this view argued that the nationalist movement should engage in a struggle against 'feudalism' in their own society, and that this entailed the eradication of all sorts of customary practices in order for a 'new man' to emerge (Hill 2002, 86). These two antagonistic views of the implications of self-determination would resurface in the wake of the referendum of 30 August 1999, and remain key fault lines during the post-independence era. They would also come to infuse arguments about, and approaches to, dealing with the dead.

The Portuguese Carnations Revolution (25 April 1974) created an opportunity for self-determination in Timor-Leste, which turned sour in 1975. First, a brief but lethal civil war (August 1975) revealed very deep fractures in the nationalist movement. A few months later, as the Portuguese authorities had all but surrendered their sovereignty, Indonesia occupied the territory on 7 December, and tried to incorporate it into the vast nation it then was. However, the brutal methods employed by the occupiers for the next 24

years led Benedict Anderson (1993) to observe that that period had done more to create a sense of commonality and national interests among the people of Timor-Leste than the entire period of Portuguese colonial rule.

The Timorese Resistance never gave up on its defence of the principle of self-determination, and in the end, their courage and endurance paid off. In 1999, a UN-supervised referendum was held, in which an overwhelming majority voted in favour of separating from Indonesia. The Indonesians reluctantly accepted a result that they had not expected, but not before pursuing a scorched earth policy that left a trail of devastation in September 1999. Over 2,500 people were killed, all significant government and commercial basic infrastructure was destroyed, and around 400,000 people were displaced (including more than 200,000 people into West Timor: OHCHR 2000; CAVR 2005: Part 7.5, 48). The UN responded by setting up a special mission, UNTAET, to guide the territory towards independent nationhood.[3] It would take another two and half years before the ceremony of restoration of independence would formally end the long period during which the Timorese lived under the domination of foreign rulers. The period after independence would also be the first opportunity for people to seek to dispel the ghosts of conflict and internal strife. Dealing with the weight of the dead in the lives of the living, has been and continues to be an important part of this process, as the following sections and the individual chapters highlight.

The dead as agents

The idea that the dead – or at least some of them – continue to intervene directly in the lives of living individuals and communities has been around for a very long time, spanning several parts of the world and different religions and cultures. Some of the earliest references to this power come from Herodotus (c. 484-c. 425 BCE), who wrote that the people from Sparta went looking for the bones of Orestes, the oracle of Delphi having told them that these were required to be laid to rest in order for the Spartans to win an

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3   Even if one argues that this was a necessity under the circumstances, the specific ways chosen by the UN to intervene constitute yet another example of foreigners disposing of dominant power. Jarat Chopra (2000) viewed this juncture as the 'UN Kingdom of East Timor' in which Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, was 'a pre-constitutional monarch'. Others regarded this intervention as a 'benevolent' form of autocracy (Beauvais 2001), despotism (Chesterman 2002) or even dictatorship (Powell 2008), all expressions of a 'benign colonialism' (Kingsbury 2009).

upcoming war. The power of the dead, including the importance of 'proper burial', is also a strong theme in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* (441 BC), in which ruler Creon's decision that rebel Polyneices' body will lie unburied on the battlefield to be eaten by worms and vultures is experienced as unbearable by Polyneices' sister.

Many centuries later, when Christianity was undergoing a true religious revolution during the fourth century and moving from persecuted sect to the status of state religion, the new creed absorbed in its beliefs and rituals elements present in 'pagan' societies now being 'converted'. One example can be seen in the story of St. Augustine's mother, Monica, who visited him in Milan and made several visits to the tombs of Christian martyrs, bringing with her 'a basket of pottage, bread and wine' to share with the dead, just like the pre-Christians used to do. At that time, St. Augustine was thought to have asked a critical question: 'Why can the dead do such great things?' (Bartlett 2013). He was referring to the emerging cult of martyrs – Christians who, after their deaths, 'attained an exceptional reward and had powers of intercession'. As Robert Bartlett (2013, 1) argues:

> Medieval Christianity developed to an extraordinary degree [...] the idea that bodies of those holy people [beings with extraordinary powers derived from special contact with the divine] should be cherished as an enduring source of supernatural power [...]. These are the saints.

The cult of saints, that is, of deceased people who performed 'miracles' while alive and retain that capacity after they die, remains to this day closely associated with the notion of 'martyrs' – 'real people who suffered bravely for something they believed in' (Ellsworth 2004, 332; see also Tambiah 2013). The idea that such people continue to have a direct influence on the events that affect living individuals and communities is one of the bedrocks upon which the official Catholic Church is based.

While the dead might be thought to have lost their power in many parts of the secular modern world, they remain potent actors in parts of Southeast Asia and in societies grappling with the legacies of colonial rule and mass conflict, especially where animist ontologies persist. Here, they continue to demand responses and urge actions from the living. Heonik Kwon (2006) writes of how the 'ghosts' of those who died in massacres committed during the long period of war in Vietnam returned to haunt the living several decades later, calling for a revival of ancestral practices that had been banned by the revolutionary post-war regime. Kwon attributes the proliferation of these ghosts to the absence of adequate funerary rituals for the dead who

were buried en masse in shallow graves, bulldozed or otherwise mistreated. Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid (2002) similarly call attention to the presence of 'the potent dead' in postcolonial Indonesia. For these authors, the potency of the dead is 'the power that certain dead – ancestors, saints and national heroes – exert over the living in contemporary religious thinking and practices' (2002: xvii).[4] Powerful dead have also materialised in the Peruvian Andes where, as Isaias Rojas-Perez (2017, 75) observes, in the face of the state's failure to account for those who were disappeared during the counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s, 'the spectres of the dead roam around their untreated remains' demanding proper funerary rights.

In Timor-Leste, the dead – who are generally transformed into ancestral spirits – are also thought to hold the capacity to intervene in the lives of the living. Variously described in this collection as 'agents' or 'actants',[5] the dead possess powers that can be benevolent and protective (see, for example, Winch in this volume) as well as malevolent. In cases where families have failed to meet their obligations, the dead can unleash misfortunes such as illness, famine and death. To appease the dead requires the performance of rituals, a key aspect of which involves 'separating' the living from the dead (Bovensiepen 2018, 59). Combining aspects of customary and Catholic practice, and taking varying forms across Timor-Leste, these rituals seek to keep the worlds of the living and the dead apart by facilitating the safe passage of the dead to the ancestral domain and ensuring that they do not return to the domain of the living – or, if they do, that they do not come in a malevolent capacity.

Processes of separating the living from the dead are perceived as particularly urgent in cases of 'bad deaths' (sometimes referred to as *mate mean*, 'red deaths') that occurred violently, unexpectedly, and suddenly. Perceived as profoundly threatening because they abruptly break the life cycle and complicate the spirit's difficult journey into the ancestral domain, secondary burials involving 'special mortuary provisions' are required to render the dead 'spiritually harmless' (Bovensiepen 2018, 67; Sakti 2013,

4   Perhaps this is the reason why it has been reported that one of the three conditions the Indonesian military are supposed to have laid down before accepting President B. J. Habibie's offer for a self-determination referendum in Timor-Leste was the need to guarantee proper treatment of the remains of soldiers who had fallen during the occupation period and were buried in Dili (Greenleaves and Garran 2002, 98). The 'Indonesian graveyard' in Dili, close to the famous Santa Cruz cemetery, is actually kept in perfect condition.

5   Bruno Latour (2004, 237) suggests that *things* can be actants: 'source[s] of action' that can 'make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events'.

443). These rituals facilitate the safe passage of the dead to the ancestral domain and prevent them from returning in a 'vengeful mood' (Thomas 1985, 36). Disruption to these rituals can result in ancestral punishment, a breakdown of existing kinship alliances, and the obstruction of potential future marriage alliances (Sakti 2013, 450).

The 'bad' deaths suffered by those who resisted the Indonesian occupation imbue the secondary burial rituals organised for them with a particular urgency; these rituals facilitate the transference of the dead from their liminal, abject state into the community of the ancestors. Freighting these rituals with added significance is the fact that there are compelling and widely circulating narratives about the necessity of 'repaying' those who are seen to have sacrificed their lives for the nation's liberation (Traube 2007). The living, who are thought to be reaping the benefits of the dead's heroic actions (in the form of living peaceful and prosperous lives in an independent nation state) are required to share these benefits with the dead because, in accordance with local codes of reciprocity, 'those who suffer to bring something forth must be repaid' (Grenfell 2015, 23, referring to Traube 2007, 10). Ultimately, these secondary burials are for the benefit and the peace of the living, helping to ensure the continuation of 'meaningful and prosperous relationships' (Bovensiepen 2018, 59, 61; see also Grenfell 2012). They can be understood as important forms of collective sense-making that have become a prevalent component of how East Timorese seek to deal with their experiences of the terrible violence of the Indonesian occupation.

What do families do in cases where the remains of the dead are unrecoverable? This is a predicament faced by many East Timorese families whose loved ones perished in unknown circumstances in the bush. The acute distress experienced by those who believe that the spirit of the dead – unable to leave the world of the living nor reach the land of the ancestors – may continue to wander and torment the living, has been well documented (Traube 1986; Robins 2010). As several of the chapters of this book touch upon, families and communities are addressing this distress in a variety of ways because the restless and unburied dead remain dangerous, not only to their living descendants but potentially also to the nation itself.

The case of Nicolau Lobato gives some sense of the scale of the dangers associated with the unburied dead. Lobato, who briefly served as East Timor's first Prime Minister, from 28 November to 7 December 1975, died in battle against the occupying Indonesian military forces on 31 December 1978. Twenty years after the referendum of 1999, the Indonesian government has not yet disclosed where his remains lie, let alone volunteered to return them. This issue remains a point of tension between the governments of

Timor-Leste and Indonesia, a thorn in otherwise peaceful relations, which reveals the injured pride of the new nation. Some view the failure of the state to secure the return of Nicolau Lobato's body as a reason why the Timorese nation has suffered so much instability and has failed to 'develop' since gaining national independence. Until the bodies of *all* the conflict-dead have been recovered, it is argued, it will not be possible to move ahead as a nation (see Kent in this volume).

The power of the dead to animate politics

Just as the dead possess the capacity to influence the living, the living can manipulate the dead to obtain certain goals. The dead are articulated with politics in at least two ways. First, political authorities may attempt to formulate prescriptions and implement public policies regarding the ways in which the dead are to be disposed of, and regarding the 'social and spiritual obligations of the bereaved' (Robben 2018, xxi). A historical example can be seen in the case of the French Revolution, when the French state argued its duty was to protect the right to life and to remove the dead from the conviviality of the living, as they were deemed to convey miasmas and diseases, creating new cemeteries. Europe in the nineteenth century followed the French lead and devised 'health laws' to adequately frame the relations between the dead and the living.[6] In East Timor, the colonial authorities attempted to regulate similar instances, namely the delay between the proclamation of death and the time of the burial, which was sometimes considered excessively long (Viegas 2016). More recent regulations have been outlined in the Concordat signed between the Vatican and the Timor-Leste state in 2015, which stipulates the need to create 'Catholic cemeteries' and prevent the burial of the dead in front of houses (as is still very common in most rural areas) (Parlamento Nacional 2015).

The second (and for our purposes more relevant) way of addressing the relationships between the dead and politics is to look at attempts by the living to integrate the dead's past deeds into a narrative that transcends the realm of the close family to assume community or national relevance and social importance. These manipulations may be conducted by political elites but also by others, including families (see Feijó in this collection). In a context where, as Catherine Arthur (2019, 11) has argued, East Timorese elites

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6   Portugal provides a good example of the difficulties experienced by the nineteenth-century authorities in their attempt to impose their modernist values (Pina-Cabral and Feijó 1983).

have attempted to develop a national historical narrative based on political symbols that, in the end, are an 'unrepresentative foundation for national identity', there is ample room for bottom-up practices of remembering and caring for the dead that extend, challenge or fill the gaps left open by elite initiatives (see Kent 2011, 2015; Viegas and Feijó 2017).

Much has been written about the vital role played by dead bodies in legitimising political regimes and imagining collective identities (Stepputat 2014; Verdery 1999). Katherine Verdery's powerful scholarship has drawn attention to how rituals focused around the bodies of renowned dead persons have served in 'many times and places as symbols of political order', helping to 'sacralise' political authority and give 'new meaning to political communities in moments of crisis' (Verdery 1999, 28; Stepputat 2014, 24). Verdery's own empirical site of analysis is the Eastern European post-socialist states in the 1990s. She writes of how, in these contexts, restless and symbolically charged dead bodies 'enchanted' or 'animated' transitional politics as their reburial in public spectacles drew attention to and sought to correct the wrongdoings of previous regimes.

For Verdery, there are at least three reasons why dead bodies possess a symbolic effectiveness in projects of nation- and state-building. First, corpses have a materiality or 'thereness' 'that allows abstract concepts such as patriotism, heroism or martyrdom to be rendered tangible' and imbues particular sites and territories with significance (Verdery 1999, 27-28). Second, corpses possess an 'ambiguity, multivocality or polysemy', which means that they are 'open to many different readings'. The dead body can be interpreted and 'evaluated from many angles and assigned perhaps contradictory virtues, vices, and intentions' (Verdery 1999, 28). While ambiguity adds to their flexibility as political symbols, it also makes them difficult for political elites to fully control because people can imbue the same corpse with diverse and personalised meanings, and such meanings can be changed. Third, the corpse is presumed to bear an 'aura of sanctity' due to its association with the sacred and the cosmic, and ideas about kinship and 'proper burial' that continue to resonate in many societies (Verdery 1999, 32-33).

Examples abound of official authorities utilising the symbolic efficacy of the dead in the process of implementing public policies and crafting national narratives. Political elites direct vast resources and energies into the creation of *lieux de mémoire* ('sites of memory': Nora 1989, 9), including national cemeteries or pantheons, the erection of statues, or simply the naming streets after the illustrious dead. This zeal is particularly striking in postcolonial and post-conflict societies, where the drive to reinforce

a sense of shared national identity is perceived as urgent and where the legitimacy of states is predicated on their ability to signify a definitive break with the violent past (Rojas-Perez 2017, 89). Through memorialisation and commemoration practices, and the reburial of emblematic dead bodies, new political orders are legitimised. By working to transform the 'universal experience of bereavement into a positive force' (Kwon 2006, 176) state-sponsored remembrance of the dead seeks to control and contain memories of violence, strengthen national unity and open up possibilities for a collective future (Rojas-Perez 2017, 89).

There are many examples of such practices in postcolonial Southeast Asia. Kwon has written of how the post-war state hierarchy in Vietnam 'promoted the worship of the heroic war dead to a civic religion [and] the apparatus of the unified Vietnamese state put great emphasis on centralizing and controlling commemorative practices' (Kwon 2006, 2-4). Schreiner observes how, in Indonesia, 'the dominant feature of the hero commemoration's spatial dimension is not the individual grave, but the collective monument, the "heroes' cemetery"'. This feature was initiated by Sukarno, who intended to 'push forward national unification by installing a new set of symbols'. It was continued by Suharto's policies, which sought to 'centralize all political arenas and to dominate the relevant symbols' (Schreiner 2002, 185, 192, 202).

Practices of this type have proliferated in Timor-Leste. Since national independence, successive governments have articulated the significance of heroes and martyrs of the Resistance for the nation. The Timor-Leste constitution affirms the 'recognition and valorisation of the secular resistance of the Maubere people against foreign domination, as well as the contribution of all those who fought for national independence' (section 11). It defines the colours of the national flag in such a way that the largest part, in red, stands for the 'struggle for national liberation' (section 5.2). Over time, a range of policies and projects have been pursued to translate these constitutional provisions into practical measures and, in the process, construct a shared national narrative based on the national liberation struggle. These include an elaborate veterans' 'valorisation' scheme including pensions and medals, statues to heroes of the Resistance, and a Resistance Museum and Archive.

Perhaps the most visually impressive of the state's projects to honour the dead is the national 'Garden of Heroes' (*Jardim dos Heróis*) cemetery in Metinaro, which is being replicated on a smaller scale in each of Timor-Leste's 13 municipalities. Like military cemeteries around the globe, including in neighbouring Indonesia, the spatial layout of the Garden of Heroes is designed to express a 'commonality of destiny' (Viegas and Feijó 2017, 101) amongst the dead, by seeking to bring them into connection

with one another through their deaths for the nation (Grenfell 2012, 99). In contrast with common practice in East Timorese cemeteries, where each grave is unique and idiosyncratic in its design, the Garden of Heroes cemetery contains tombs of the same shape, material and colour, evenly spaced in rows. Yet the Garden of Heroes also establishes and entrenches hierarchies amongst the dead, delineating those who are more worthy of state recognition than others. The cemetery in Metinaro, in Dili municipality, is designated for those whose participation in the Resistance is deemed of 'particular importance', while those deemed of lesser importance are to be buried in the municipality equivalents. The internal spatial arrangement of the Metinaro Garden of Heroes further reinforces these hierarchies, with the largest and highest graves designated for the 'founding fathers' of the state – Xavier do Amaral and Nicolau Lobato.[7] Needless to say, those who were not part of the resistance struggle (including those deemed to have supported the 'wrong side') are excluded from burial in these cemeteries.

While political elites may seek to use the political efficacy of the dead to serve nation-building goals and bolster legitimising narratives, history is awash with examples of how such projects do not always play out according to the official 'script'. Dissonance between state-sponsored projects and the feelings and stories of families is not unusual, and corpses can be assigned new meanings in accordance with shifting political circumstances. A recent example can be seen in the transformation of the grandiose monument entitled *Valle de los Caidos* (lit. 'the valley of the fallen') in Spain. Erected by the late dictator Francisco Franco during his term in office, to render homage to the nationalists killed in the civil war, the monument is now being turned into a memorial to *all* the victims of the civil war, and the Spanish parliament approved the removal of Franco's remains from the monument in 2018.[8] In Portugal, there has been much controversy about how the main figure of the right-wing authoritarian regime that fell on 25 April 1974, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, should be publicly remembered. In the immediate aftermath of the regime, most references to Salazar's name were removed from the public sphere. An exception was the little town in

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7   See Decree Law 30/2017.
8   The rationale offered for this new attitude is the fact that Franco was not a victim of the civil war, but someone who died peacefully in bed 36 years after the end of the conflict. The move has been staunchly opposed by his family. Franco supporters have brought the case both to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, who are the trusted keepers of the monument, and (unsuccessfully) to the Spanish civilian courts, delaying the execution of the parliamentary mandate until November 2019.

Figure 0.1   Garden of Heroes Cemetery, Metinaro

Photo: Lia Kent

central Portugal where he was born, where a statue remained for some time. A few months after the revolution, after the statue had been painted with bright yellow and red paint, the authorities decided to cover it with a large black cloth. Even so, an anonymous group of people managed to behead the statue in early 1978.[9]

In Timor-Leste, official projects to honour the dead have similarly not always proceeded according to plan. Yet, in contrast to Spain and Portugal, the issue here seems to be not so much that the legitimacy of those designated as heroes or martyrs of the Resistance is contested (although rumours that 'false' veterans and martyrs are receiving funeral honours and veterans' payments do circulate). Rather, it is that centralised, state-sponsored projects operating according to the controlled, modernist (and

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9   In early 1978, after the heat of the revolutionary period had waned, a local committee was formed to raise money to restore the statue of the town's best-known son. They managed to have the severed head of the dictator replaced on the statue, but this action elicited a strong response from the other camp, and a bomb blew the statue to pieces. There were conflicting public demonstrations during which at least one person lost her life. Recent attempts to create an 'interpretative centre' for the Salazar era in this little town elicited widespread national controversy and opposition, including a vote of rejection for the idea taken in the national parliament. All of this shows that the recent international movement to remove controversial statues from the public domain has a long history.

largely secular) language of nation-building and imposing a collective frame of remembrance are, at times, in tension with families' needs and obligations to the dead. To take one key example, families have sometimes opposed the reburial of a deceased family member in a centralised Garden of Heroes cemetery on the basis that proximity to graves is important to facilitate regular visits and ongoing communication with and care for the dead (Viegas and Feijó 2017, 107). This tension speaks to a broader reluctance of families to alienate the dead from their personalised identities, embedded as they are in a complex web of kinship relations. A related issue is that state-sponsored initiatives, in which the dead are treated as abstract symbols capable of being subsumed into collective narratives, fail to acknowledge or engage with the potency of the dead as agents. As we explored in the earlier section, in East Timorese cosmology the dead are not merely 'symbols' that can be used for political goals, but rather 'agents in their own right' (Myrttinen 2014, 99). To explore these dynamics in more detail, we provide a brief case study of the failed *Kore Metan Nasional* (the National End of Mourning) initiative.

The *Kore Metan Nasional* (National End of Mourning)

The *Kore Metan Nasional* was an officially-sanctioned initiative that sought to deal with the power and the weight of the dead in the lives of the living and expunge it once and for all. In August 2015, the national government announced the *Kore Metan Nasional* to mark 'the end of mourning of the whole nation in relation to those who fell for national liberation' (Government of Timor-Leste, Press Release 25 August 2015). The initiative would take place from 4 September – the anniversary of the date when the results of the 1999 referendum were announced – until 31 December, 'Heroes Day', which marks the date of the murder of FALINTIL leader Nicolau Lobato in 1978. On 31 December of that year, the first stone of a new 'National Monument to Those Sacrificed in the War' would be laid.

Organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs, under the guidance of the then Minister, Dionísio Babo Soares – an anthropologist by training – the *Kore Metan Nasional* brought together traditional leaders and representatives of the Catholic Church for a series of ceremonies in Dili. Following a mass in the Dili cathedral, traditional leaders sacrificed pigs and chickens and lit white candles around a *biti* (mat) in front of the Government Palace. This aspect of the ceremony mimicked the *nahe biti* (spreading the mat) rituals that are performed throughout the country and that are used by

families and neighbours to resolve disputes (Babo Soares 2005). Major figures of the Resistance, including Xanana Gusmão, Mari Alkatiri, and Lu Olo, were present, as was Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo. Similar events were held in each district. Black ribbons were widely distributed throughout the country, the idea being to offer an opportunity to every family to publicly display a symbol of mourning while the national process lasted. The ribbons would then be collected at the end of the period and placed in a central location in order to have personal references to each individual who was being honoured. The government's press release (Government of Timor-Leste, 4 September 2015) set out clearly that the underlying goal of the *Kore Metan Nasional* was to provide a contained and time-bound mechanism to acknowledge the dead with a view to moving forwards as a nation:

> This period is a time to look back on the past, recognizing the struggle, and then to look forward, to embrace the future with unity, committed to the journey of nation building and development [...] Our ancestors are watching. In this time we mourn the past and acknowledge our loss. Then we honour the struggle by moving forward, faces uplifted, unified as we develop the nation. By remembering and then pressing on together to build Timor-Leste we know that those that went before us would be proud and those who come after us can enjoy a promising future.

Minister Babo Soares further explained to the online newspaper *Timor Agora* on 4 September 2019 that the aim of the *Kore Metan Nasional* was to:

> put an end to the period in which we are dominated by the sentiments of sadness, suffering, revolt and loss of our beloved ones during the Indonesian occupation, and move forward into a phase of superation, acceptance and peace along the way of evolution, progress and development.

As he elaborated in an interview (12 November 2016), 'We were expecting to reformat the people's mindset'.

Although it was not spelled out explicitly, the *Kore Metan Nasional* was driven in part by concerns amongst the political elite about the impact on finances (both public and private) of the high number of individual ceremonies to recover, rebury, and honour martyrs. Such activities were regarded as an irrational use of resources that should be channelled to other, more 'productive' ends. Of particular concern was that families were using their sizeable payments under the veterans' scheme to fund

reburial rituals rather than setting up small businesses or otherwise investing this money. Such wastefulness, it was argued, was impeding 'development'.[10]

Seen in this light, the main purpose of the *Kore Metan Nasional* was to reduce, if not altogether eliminate the need for families to conduct mortuary rituals for each and every deceased person. By providing a collective, national ceremony, the *Kore Metan* might serve as sort of a blanket to cover those dead who, for whatever reason, had not yet been the object of a funerary ceremony of their own. In a way, the initiative was also a pragmatic acknowledgement by the state that, in a context where thousands of bodies remained unaccounted for and where there are many competing priorities for resource allocation, it would be practically impossible to locate, identify, exhume, and rebury each and every martyr.

Set against these concerns, the *Kore Metan Nasional* was performed in such a way as to satisfy – at least at face value – both customary and modern forms of honouring the dead. The participation of the Catholic Church, customary leaders, and leading political figures associated with the Resistance instantiated this ideal unity. The government's decision to name the event a *Kore Metan* was itself a reference to the widely practiced customary Timorese ritual of 'taking off the black' that generally takes place after one year of mourning.

Several years later, this initiative has not met its desired aim. The first stone in the National Monument to Those Sacrificed in the War has not been laid and families continue to spend large sums of money on organising individual ceremonies for their own dead. The black ribbons profusely distributed among the population have not yet been retrieved by the authorities to be brought together in a central place. Some East Timorese refer to them as pieces of a meaningless enterprise. Others continue to light candles nightly and wait in vain for the government to return to collect them and officially end the mourning period. Members of the political elite also seem to have recognised the flawed nature of this initiative. One year after the supposed end of the national mourning period, Dionísio Babo Soares commented that 'ideas about this project have evolved' and 'we now envisage it as an ongoing process' (interview, 12 November 2016). He acknowledged the difficulty of bringing about an official 'end' to national mourning. When asked why, he responded, 'Well, we cannot remove the period of struggle from our heads'.

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10   Kelly Silva (2017, 194) notes that a similar rationale was behind the government's decision to promote a procedure known as *tara bandu* in Ermera and elsewhere in Timor-Leste.

We can think of several interrelated factors that contributed to the resounding failure of the *Kore Metan Nasional*. First, it is likely that many people perceived this initiative as an inadequate means of recognising, honouring, and repaying the debt owed to those who sacrificed their lives for the nation. As an initiative that operated at a symbolic level, the *Kore Metan Nasional* did not provide the material means to sustain individual rituals around the country for each and every martyr. Moreover, by attempting to enrol the dead into a collective, national, memory framework, it is likely that the *Kore Metan Nasional* did violence towards families' efforts to reconstitute and recognise each martyr in their distinct personhood: in their anatomical specificity, their network of kinship relations, their personal history and as agents with needs and demands (cf. Crossland 2015, 242-243).

Finally, and relatedly, to accept a symbolic measure such as a *Kore Metan Nasional* would, for many East Timorese, be a risky venture due to the 'elusive and fundamentally unknowable' nature of the dead and their demands (Bovensiepen 2018, 67). As Bovensiepen observes, the dead can be unpredictable and capricious, and their unknowable quality increases the threat that emanates from them. Even in cases of family-led rituals, there is always an element of doubt or uncertainty as to the completeness and success of such ceremonial actions, including whether they have been able to fully accomplish the 'severance between the living and dead' (Bovensiepen 2018, 67). Such doubts are likely to be magnified in the case of a controlled, time-bound, state-led initiative over which families of the dead have had little control.

Focusing on the failure of the *Kore Metan Nasional* makes visible the fact that, while authorities may seek to harness the power of the dead as part of a process of building political community, the dead are not a 'blank canvass for the inscription of political agendas' (Stepputat 2014, 26). They are not, that is, abstract symbols to be appropriated and used by political elites in the service of nation-building goals. Families may resist attempts to subsume the dead into collective narratives by imposing time-bound initiatives that alienate the dead from their kin and fail to appreciate the depth and complexity of the moral and social obligations of the living. The dead may also participate in the disruption of elite nation-building goals through their capacity – as both visible, material substances and as agents – to call attention to forms of misrecognition, neglect and unfinished business. This is a case in which the sovereignty of the living over the dead has been reversed, and the dead actually govern the living (Borneman 2014, 229).

Overview of the Chapters

Part I comprises two framing chapters that address some of the fundamental questions posed by a consideration of the dead as martyrs, ancestors, and national heroes. Taking as a starting point a review of the literature on ancestors in general, Chapter 1, by anthropologist Susana Viegas, discusses the historically and socially specific meanings of two categories – 'ancestors' and 'martyrs' – in Timor-Leste. She suggests that these categories are not synonymous: rather, 'martyrs' has emerged as a 'category of personhood' in a specific historical context, which is marked by a deep articulation with the strong presence of 'ancestors' in the daily life of the Timorese. In Chapter 2, Michael Leach, a political scientist, examines the relationship between 'martyrs' and 'heroes' and explores the ongoing challenges involved in creating a narrative of national identity based on past suffering during the resistance to Indonesian occupation. With a specific focus on the conservation of difficult sites in the struggle for independence, including jails, interrogation centres, sites of massacres, and monuments, he draws out the different colonial and postcolonial 'layers' of the cultural heritage landscape and their competing visions of East Timorese identity.

Part II comprises six chapters that explore the power of the dead in everyday life. Rich in ethnographic detail, these chapters are principally focused on the relationship between 'martyrs' of the long East Timorese struggle for self-determination and the powerful entities into which they may have been transformed by virtue of their death, which are usually called 'ancestors'. The chapters bring to the fore the conviviality and vitality of ancestral practices inscribed in the *longue durée* and highlight their relevance in the aftermath of the Indonesian occupation as part of the process of reconstituting community. The dynamism, creativity, and transformation of social and cultural values in contemporary Timor-Leste also emerge as a central theme.

In Chapter 3, Alessandro Boarccaech discusses the Humangili, a community located on the island of Ataúro in Timor-Leste, for whom the worlds of the dead and the living maintain a constant relation. Boarccaech investigates possible points of contact between the belief in spirits of nature and ancestors and the meaning of the hero among the Humangili. He finds that the notion of *hero* (who is generally understood to be a warrior who held a leadership role and died in combat) contributes to the stability of local customs and beliefs because it reinforces established values. In Chapter 4, Bronwyn Winch examines how the dead can provide forms of protection for their living relatives. She considers how items imbued with protective