Article:
Kim, J orcid.org/0000-0002-4777-6397 (2016) Necrosociality: isolated death and unclaimed cremains in Japan. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 22 (4). pp. 843-863. ISSN 1359-0987

https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12491

Necrosociality: isolated death and unclaimed cremains in Japan

JIEUN KIM Freie Universität Berlin

Inquiring into concerns surrounding death and the afterlife in an underclass enclave in Japan, this article proposes that the politics of survival involves engaging with the enduring relationship between the living and the dead, referred to as 'necrosociality'. Based on fieldwork carried out in Yokohama, it explores how 'isolated death' (kodokushi) and 'disconnected spirits' (muenbotoke) have become major concerns in homeless activism and support, giving rise to various necrosocial innovations and practices. The emergent necrosociality in Yokohama conjures up an alternative logic of care that connects people based on the general premise of inevitable decay and decline rather than familial ties and intimate memories. This article suggests that the concept of necrosociality provides a useful framework analysing how social relations are negotiated, reaffirmed or negated through bodily remains and graves, effectively shaping the modes of being and care among the living.

In 2011, on one of my first visits to the Kotobuki Welfare Workshop, a sheltered workshop for the physically disabled in the Kotobuki district of Yokohama in Japan, I noticed a small table covered with a pale pink cloth against the inner wall facing the entrance. On the table were two portrait photos of elderly men in black frames. An incense burner, a ritual bell (orin) and condolence money in front of the photos immediately made it clear that this was a memorial altar (butsudan). Placed around each of the framed photos were a funeral urn wrapped in elaborately patterned paper, a plain wood mortuary tablet (ihai) inscribed with a Buddhist posthumous name (*kaimyō*), a candle, artificial flowers, and a few other items that would have been cherished by the deceased, such as cigarettes, canned drinks and sweets. Behind the table on metal shelves was a display of more than a dozen laminated photos of other members of the workshop who had died previously.

Over the course of my fieldwork in Kotobuki, I learned that these material reminders of the deceased were attended to with great care. A staff person or a member of the workshop would burn incense, light candles, and offer drinks to those enshrined, with special attention paid on occasions such as the Obon summer festival for the dead and the spring and autumn equinoxes (ohigan). On the annual group excursion, the workshop members would bring along the laminated photos and offer alcohol to them before partaking themselves. During these trips, which provided members with a rare opportunity to leave Kotobuki, some would also buy small souvenirs for the deceased as well as for themselves.

Many organizations and facilities in Kotobuki made similarly strenuous efforts to maintain ties with the dead with separate altars or space reserved for them.

Commemorative activities constitute a large part of daily routines and events in Kotobuki, offering a consolation for the living that they, too, will be cared for after their death in this district to which most came as a refuge of last resort after severing ties with their families. The extent to which mortuary practices were incorporated into the daily lives in this underclass enclave drew my attention to the significance of the enduring relationship between the living and the dead in the politics of survival.

My eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in Kotobuki[1] between 2010 and 2014, at a time when it had long ceased functioning as Japan's third largest district for day labourers (yoseba). As an increasing number of such labourers became permanently homeless owing to the slowing economy, the survival of the homeless emerged as the central issue in the district, giving rise to homeless activism. Today, a common characteristic of those who live in Kotobuki is their estrangement in some form or another from significant relationships in their lives. Some are former day labourers who maintained their independence by sleeping on the street until they could no longer cope with the physical hardship. Others are alcoholics, the chronically ill and the disabled, who have found themselves homeless after a period of hospitalization or unemployment. Still others are failed businessmen or former salaried workers who became estranged from their families after losing their jobs and being evicted from their homes, often at an advanced age. Owing to this concentration of the impoverished, the disabled, and the elderly, Kotobuki can appear as yet another example of a 'zone of abandonment' (Biehl 2005), and indeed some people have likened the district to ubasuteyama (lit. a mountain on which to abandon old women).[2] However, this is not the whole story. Kotobuki is also a place of refuge where the homeless can receive public assistance, find housing in single-room occupancies and use services offered by welfare facilities, such as sheltered workshops and daycare centres for the elderly and disabled.

This article discusses how the district's transformation over recent decades into a bastion of the right to survival has involved engaging with concerns related to death and the afterlife as well as with life itself. I suggest that at the heart of the politics of life and death lies the generative sociality connecting the living and the dead, what I term 'necrosociality'.[3] Paul Rabinow's concept of biosociality (Rabinow 1996) has provided fertile ground for anthropologists in exploring how new configurations of identities and networks emerge in unexpected ways with advances in biotechnology precipitated by the state's increasing preoccupation with 'life itself (Rabinow & Rose 2006:212; Rose 2006). By introducing the term 'necrosociality', I intend to shed light on how the state's management of the wellbeing of its population is complicated as unexpected relationships and collectivities arise surrounding death. In so doing, this article traces the politics of death in a process during which the relationship between the living and the dead is constantly transfigured and negotiated (Bloch & Parry 1982; Hertz 1960; Kwon 2008; Langford 2013; Mueggler 2001; Verdery 1999) rather than in the threat of the ultimate exercise of discretionary sovereign power (Agamben 1998). The politics of death, in this sense, concerns more than the violence inflicted on the living or the horror it causes; it also engages with the logic of relations between the living and the dead.

Concerns over death and the afterlife of the homeless in this article centre on material exchanges and engagement with the deceased. As has been well explored by

anthropologists (Boret 2014; Kawano 2010; Nelson 2015; Schattschneider 2001; 2005; Suzuki 2000), beliefs regarding death and the afterlife vary widely in Japan, yet the material state and location of dead bodies and graves are common matters of great importance for the living. This article suggests that concerns over the wellbeing of the dead are inseparable from the political economy of welfare in Japan, which relies on prescribed relations of care.[4] While the bodies of citizens during their lifetime are subject to management and discipline for better productive and reproductive abilities, dead bodies also help to ensure the continuation of the ie (patrilineal household), which secures the wellbeing and prosperity of the living.[5] As shown in Margaret Lock's compelling study of organ transplantation and brain death in Japan, the familial duty of care is even more vital when a member's body is in a vulnerable state such as a coma, as his/her bodily integrity is dependent solely on the surviving family (Lock 2001: 215-26). This article aims to serve as a counterpoint to Lock's work by focusing on those who spend the last years of their lives disconnected from such familial ties in Japan.

I argue that a central concern shared by the living and the dead in the particular configuration of necrosociality in Kotobuki is the material process of decay to which bodies and graves succumb if they are not cared for. In Kotobuki, such fear is particularly pronounced in regard to facing isolated death (kodokushi) and becoming a disconnected spirit whose bodily remains are abandoned (muenbotoke). This article traces the dynamics of death and care in two loci where these concerns are focused: the single-room occupancies, locally known as doya, where isolated deaths commonly occur, and the collective graves where the bodies of those without relatives are buried. By tracing practices of care prompted by the bodily remains of those who live out their last years in Kotobuki, I discuss how the politics of survival are instantiated in the concerted endeavour to avoid such a fate.

Isolated deaths and doya rooms

Kotobuki emerged as a day labourers' district and doya quarter (doya gai)[6] in the mid-1950s, with its well-defined boundary of 200 metres by 300 metres in the heart of the city of Yokohama.[7] By the time of my fieldwork, the district had become abundant with support activities for the homeless, most of which appeared after the tragic deaths of homeless labourers lynched by a teenage group in the adjacent area in 1982-3 (Gill 2001:177-178). The attacks prompted Kotobuki activists to prioritize 'the right to survival' (seizonken) over the previous agenda of the right to work, a move that successfully gathered supporters from surrounding areas and from across the country during the 1980s and 1990s. As the well-organized activists and supporters accompanied the homeless in applying for livelihood protection (seikatsu hogo, a form of public assistance) and pressured the local welfare office not to turn away those in need, Kotobuki became one of the most amenable places for the homeless to receive livelihood protection, which included housing assistance covering the rent of a doya room in the district. As of 2012, Kotobuki's 122 doya buildings accommodated 6,500 residents, more than 80 per cent of whom were receiving livelihood protection.[8]

Consequently doya rooms, originally built as temporary lodgings for day labourers, inadvertently became a final refuge for single elderly men, many of whom suffered from complicated health problems. These minimally furnished rooms, usually the size of three tatami mats (4.8 square metres, or 51 square feet), provide their inhabitants with shelter and privacy but also often isolate them and deprive them of the means of seeking help at critical moments. According to Tanaka Toshio, an experienced social worker and the founder of the Kotobuki Communal Clinic, there were about 600 cases of 'cancellation of livelihood protection due to death' in Kotobuki in 2009. In other words, one or two people receiving livelihood protection would die every day in Kotobuki (Tanaka 2009: 72-3). Tanaka noted that a high percentage of such deaths occurred in doya rooms and were only discovered long after the event (Tanaka 2009: 74-5). Such unattended death, widely known as kodokushi in Japan, was one of the major concerns of the many organizations and individuals involved in the district during the time of my fieldwork, with estimates ranging from 100 to 200 such deaths a year. The most vivid account of isolated death I heard came from Okamoto Sōdai, a Korean-Japanese doya manager, who was known in the district for his dedicated care of doya residents.

> When I first came here ten years ago [2001], I began by analysing what kind of place this was and what kind of business could be carried out… Well, then, what are the problems we have here? Isolated deaths (kodokushi). They happen quite often. People die and nobody notices. Once they die, the smell of decay leaks out, because the body decomposes. I was so shocked when I first saw one of these bodies. It had swollen so much that it looked as though it would burst. Have you ever seen such a thing? I watched my parents pass away, but you would never allow a body to decompose so much that it swells up like that. Here, a body can go unnoticed not just for a couple of days, but even for a week or two. And because the rooms are closed up, if the temperature goes up to 30 or 40 degrees, … maggots and flies come out of the body …, and the body swells up and looks just like a black person. I was awfully shocked. I experienced that six times in six months and really thought that it was too much …[9]

Okamoto mentioned this as a moment of epiphany that opened his eyes to the crisis of care in Kotobuki. The figure of the decomposing body, as poignantly decribed by Okamoto's statement, has been central to the discourses surrounding isolated death in Japan from the very beginning, when the term appeared in Japanese media in the early 1970s. Initially, isolated death was associated with the elderly living alone in large-scale apartment blocks (Yūki 2014: 52-4), but the phenomenon gained renewed attention following the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, as reports of the unattended deaths of elderly evacuees in temporary housing became widespread. These reports added to the public outrage against the government for its failure to provide proper care for the disaster victims (Otani 2010: 161-74). It was against this background with these same sentiments that people in Kotobuki began to problematize isolated death.

Such preoccupation with putrescence is not unique to Japan, as has been well documented by many anthropologists. Various mortuary rituals include practices to prevent or regulate putrescence by embalming or mummifying the body, by consuming

the flesh, or by re-burying the flesh-free bones after an initial period of decomposition below ground (Bloch & Parry 1982; Palgi & Abramovitch 1984). These various measures reflect the belief that the improper decomposition of the corpse disturbs the deceased's transition to the afterworld and the harmony and wellbeing of the bereaved community. In contemporary Japan, where cremation constitutes 99.9 per cent of total burials, the body of the deceased before cremation is considered to be in a particularly precarious state. Anthropologist Suzuki Hikaru, noting the difference in Japanese terms between a corpse (shitai) and the remains of the deceased (itai, or, with an honorific prefix, goitai), characterizes this phase between death and cremation as the state of the 'living-dead' when careful attention in bathing, transportation, and accompaniment is required (Suzuki 2000: 229). The delicacy and sensitivity required of those in charge of this postmortem stage is touchingly depicted in Takita Yōjirō's 2008 film Departures (Okuribito, lit. the one who sends off). Through the story of a young man who begins a new job as a mortician (*nōkanshi*), the film shows how the sophisticated practice of encoffinment (*nōkan*), in which the body is prepared and dressed for cremation, can provide a final moment of reconciliation and closure for families, relieving their sense of loss, remorse or long-held resentment.

In other words, a proper transition to the afterlife in Japan is dependent upon one's body being treated with due respect as 'honourable remains' by one's descendants. As part of this process, encoffinment is swiftly followed by cremation, and the cremains are taken by the eldest son or distributed among the patrilineal descendants, so they can be enshrined appropriately in funeral altars and, eventually, in the ancestral grave. The material state and location of the bodily remains are decisive matters in the successful transition of the deceased to the ancestral world, and this in turn is crucial in ensuring the continued prosperity of the household. The deceased is regularly visited, conversed with, and offered water and food. Careful attention is also paid to associated objects such as mortuary tablets (ihai), and gravestones, which are regularly furbished and festooned. Each of these stages is sanctified by the Buddhist temple to which the ancestral grave of the deceased belongs. The temples generally instruct that individualized memorial services should be offered at prescribed intervals for a period of at least thirty-three to a hundred years (Smith 1974: 95) in order for the deceased successfully to attain buddhahood (*jōbutsu*). While the observance of such practices depends widely on the region, the socio-economic standing of the family, and other circumstantial factors, the notion that the state of the bodily remains and their surroundings affects the deceased's attainment of j*ōbutsu*, understood more commonly today as enjoying 'a happy afterlife' (Kenney 2004:59), remains prevalent.

In contrast with the respect extended to the bodily remains described above, any decomposition of flesh brings the body closer to the antithesis of a person, that is, rubbish: rubbish that cannot be salvaged and take its rightful place in the cycle of regeneration and reciprocity, but rather disrupts the natural order, in the physical as much as the symbolic sense.[10] As evinced by the horrifying attacks on the homeless in the 1980s, which were justified by the assailants as 'cleaning the rubbish off the streets' (Gill 2001: 178), or by the often-used slogan of 'We are not garbage!' by homeless activists (Hasegawa 2006), the homeless are easily relegated to a separate world of non-persons. By spending their final years in doya rooms, people acquire a different ontological status

from the homeless by escaping their fate of dying in the street. Although street death (*kōryoshi*, or more colloquially, notarejini) in Japan is quintessentially a 'bad death' engendering unsettled spirits (Bloch & Parry 1982:15-8; Hertz 1960: 22), it is almost exclusively associated with those who have already lost their homes. In contrast, isolated death disturbs the dichotomy of the home and the street, persons and non-persons, and ultimately, ancestors and ghosts. Occurring at home, isolated death reminds Japanese that nobody is completely safe from such appalling death and its resultant afterlife, especially in the postindustrial economy in which many remain single and isolated due to unstable employment and housing provision (Allison 2013: 122-65; NHK 2010: 211-42).

This helps to explain why isolated deaths are considered to be particularly disturbing and requiring of preventative measures in Japan. Although unexpected death had always been common in Kotobuki, the decomposing bodies of those who died in doya rooms made such deaths readily identifiable as 'isolated deaths', despite the questionable status of doya being a home. One might say that the relocation of the death of the homeless from the street to indoors profoundly changed the way in which care, death and social exclusion were discussed and addressed in Kotobuki. This distinction between isolated death and street death reveals that, in discussing thanatopolitics (Agamben 1998: 122), further attention needs to be paid to how the dead continue to matter for the living in different ways depending on the manner of their death and the treatment of their physical remains. Agamben's zones of indistinction, in this sense, are better construed as a critical time/space in which personhood is reconfigured and various socialities are negotiated surrounding death and dead bodies.

When an isolated death occurs, the caseworker of the deceased calls the relatives to ask if they are willing to hold the funeral and claim the cremains. As the relatives tend to decline, the bodies of those who experience isolated death in Kotobuki are most likely to end their journey in the Kuboyama Public Cemetery run by the Yokohama city government about four kilometres northwest of the district. Built in 1874 not far from the centre of the then nascent city of Yokohama, the cemetery expanded to host 13,940 grave slots within its current area of 126,21 square metres as the city grew. With graveyards of local temples and residential buildings squeezing in from all directions, there is barely any space in between tombstones in the cemetery. The gigantic 'Cinerarium for the Deceased without Relatives' stands in the northwest corner of the cemetery separated from the other areas of closely packed ancestral graves. The cinerarium stores unclaimed funerary urns for five years, after which they are taken out and buried in the ground behind. Although the city holds a modest memorial service once a year when it buries the overdue cremains, the burial site exhibits clear signs of neglect with cracked memorial stones and piles of timeworn wooden *sotōba* (memorial sticks). According to the city, the usage rate of the cinerarium increased 3.7 times during the past two decades from 211 urns a year in 1989 to 779 in 2009.[11] This period coincided with the ageing of Kotobuki's population, due in part to the influx of the impoverished, elderly single men that followed its transformation into a 'welfare town'. Concerns about muenbotoke in the district centred on this public cinerarium as the final resting place of these men.

Consisting of the words muen (without ties or attachment) and hotoke (lit. Buddha, but also used to refer to the deceased), muenbotoke (lit. disconnected spirits) contrasts with

the terms hotokesama (venerable buddhas) or gosenzosama (venerable ancestors), which are used to describe the spirits of the deceased en route to the realm of the collective ancestral world. Historically, the figure of muenbotoke was used interchangeably with that of gaki (hungry ghosts), who were believed to inhabit one of the three evil realms of existence, in contrast with the three realms of virtuous existence, where asuras (the lowest ranks of deities), humans and heavenly beings reside (Ikegami 2014: 77). Unable to transmigrate to a higher realm of existence, a gaki is doomed to wander this world restlessly in a state of hunger, misery and resentment. In medieval Buddhist scrolls, such as the Gaki z*ōshi* (The Scroll of the Hungry Ghosts) from the twelfth century, gaki were typically depicted as skeletal figures with bloated stomachs trying in vain to satisfy their hunger by eating corpses and excrement, which turned into flames in their mouths. Writing in the 1970s, Robert Smith noted that rural communities, fearing that gaki might enter the bodies of the newly dead or cause harm to the living, made offerings called segaki to pacify these spirits during the Obon festival (Smith 1974: 41-3). While the term gaki has fallen out of favour amongst both Buddhist clerics and ordinary people owing to its discriminatory connotations (Ikegami 2014: 79-82), the term muenbotoke is still widely used to refer to those who have died without descendants or those whose descendants do not perform the necessary posthumous rites (Boret 2014: 13-4; Schattschneider 2001: 863).

These muenbotoke may still be evoked as haunting figures restlessly wandering around this world in misery and resentment, especially in communities where the deceased is remembered and his or her loss is felt acutely among the living, such as in northeastern Japan after the great earthquake and tsunami in 2011. However, in the everyday usage of the term, muenbotoke is more commonly associated with unclaimed cremains or untended graves with dilapidated gravestones (NHK 2010; Rowe 2011: 46-7). In Kotobuki, while the fear of being buried in the Kuboyama cinerarium and becoming a muenbotoke was immanent in daily practices and conversations,[12] I have not heard of any particular muenbotoke haunting the district. Rather, as one resident put it, pointing at others sitting on the street half-asleep half-drunk, 'Kotobuki is a town of ghosts (*yūrei no* machi)', where the living were already deemed muenbotoke. The very fact that muenbotoke were normalized seemed to have prompted people to take redemptive actions, similar to what Martha and Bruce Lincoln (2014: 200-1) called 'secondary haunting'. Situating their own study of the haunting of the Khmer Rouge massacre victims in a southern Vietnamese village within the ethnographies of ghosts, Lincoln and Lincoln distinguished 'secondary haunting', which mobilizes a moral community with a shared sense of responsibility for the sufferings of the dead, from 'primary haunting', which involves an unmediated and intense interaction between the living and the dead during which the latter demand immediate redress and appeasement. While these two modes of haunting are not mutually exclusive, I have noticed that in Kotobuki today a mere reference to isolated death and muenbotoke was sufficient to arouse attention and care, bypassing questions over the metaphysics of the afterworld and the ontology of the deceased. The particular way that muenbotoke mobilized concerned actors and concerted effort shows how different modes of haunting are instantiated by necrosocial contestation over the boundaries of state-sanctioned relations.

With heightened awareness of the prevalence of isolated deaths, Kotobuki became a testing ground for new necrosocial practices. For example, Sanagitachi, a non-profit organization for the homeless, launched the Kotobuki Mimamori Volunteer Programme[13] in 2007. With the co-operation of local doctors, nurses, and home helpers, the programme linked up student volunteers with Kotobuki residents in an attempt to fulfill the role normally played by family members: for example, visiting and talking with the bed-ridden, checking the whereabouts of those suffering from dementia, taking those in wheelchairs to clinics, picking up medications, helping with walking rehabilitation, and shopping for groceries. This vast range of care work was provided under the slogan 'to prevent isolated deaths', akin to end-of-life care aiming primarily at keeping company with the elderly until their death.[14] Concerns over isolated death also motivated Kotobuki residents to socialize, such as in the case of Murata Hamao, who was the first person to draw my attention to isolated death as the most urgent issue in Kotobuki. Having developed a rare muscular disease in his late twenties, he relied on his mother for twelve years, but when she could no longer support him, he moved to Kotobuki in 2007 to receive livelihood protection. Although physically restricted by his condition, Murata was doing his best to avoid the fate that befell many who lived a secluded life in Kotobuki. Criticizing those who spent their time locked up in Kotobuki as 'merely inhabiting' (sumu dake), he attended a variety of social activities organized by Sanagitachi, took part in recreational programmes and homeless patrols, and eventually moved out of the district to an apartment nearby, while still spending most of his daytime in Kotobuki with other residents and volunteers.[15]

The most significant changes originated from the doya rooms themselves. Okamoto Sōdai, the doya manager mentioned earlier, was a pioneer on this front, and the innovations he introduced in his doya became a point of reference for a wave of doya renewals that swept Kotobuki in response to the changing demographic. After a couple of years in Kotobuki, Okamoto started working with a new doya owner and helped him modify the building to make it accessible to those in wheelchairs and with other disabilities. In a similar way to the Kotobuki Mimamori Volunteer Programme, Okamoto also developed a network of contacts with the many supporters – from medical professionals to caseworkers – in the district. In order to make sure that the doya residents had regular visitors, Okamoto helped them register for the government helper system[16] and lunch box (*bentō*) delivery services. Most notably, he encouraged the doya owner to install a 'nurse-call system' in each room, corridor, and restroom.

I refer to the practices and technological innovations addressing such concerns in Kotobuki as 'necrosocial' to emphasize how they intervene in and mediate the processes of mortuary transition, thereby shaping the ways in which the deceased maintain ties with the living. While they might help to save lives at critical moments, they were not promoted as enhancing life per se. Both Okamoto and Sanagitachi devised these innovative practices and effectively gathered sympathizers under the goal of preventing isolated death, i.e., witnessing death at the right time and, by extension, assisting a smooth and proper transition to the afterlife. As such, doya rooms, like cocoons facilitating this transition, came to promote a different kind of necrosociality than a home setting. A normative home in Japan is a dwelling place for the living, who prosper under the blessing of their ancestors enshrined in funerary altars (butsudan) in the home. In

contrast, the enhanced doya rooms incorporate their inhabitants into an assemblage of many devices and agents that prevent them from dying in isolation.

The ramifications of these practices and technologies preventing isolated death lie in the ways they engage with the oppositional logic of relations embedded in the national ideology and political economy in Japan that distinguishes between those with familial and associational ties (*yūen*, lit. with en) from those without (muen). En, commonly used to indicate relations, relatedness, bonds or connections, derives from the Buddhist doctrine of codependent origination (engi) or karmic connection (innen) (Lock 2001: 220; Rowe 2011: 45-6). While its Buddhist etymology connotes that everything in the universe is connected by interwoven strands of causality, today en is most often used as a suffix to more concrete substances such as blood (as in ketsuen, blood-ties), land (as in chien, community-ties), and company (as in shaen, company-based ties) to indicate affiliations characterized by reciprocal moral orientations and interests. Muen, on the other hand, literally means the absence of en, indicating the state of being relationless and disconnected.[17]

The present-day usage of the terms reflects how families, neighbourhoods, and corporations have become established as the primary locus of care over the course of modern state formation and capitalist development in Japan. The wellbeing of citizens has been legally and institutionally defined as a communal responsibility of these entities, with corporations providing their employees and their families with access to housing, health care, and pension provision, and families and neighborhood communities being responsible for poverty relief (Garon 1998: 228). Such 'Japanese-style welfare' (Garon 1998: 223), as promoted by Japanese policy-makers and corporations in the late 1970s, has kept public spending relatively low until recently, mainly undermining the social security of people with non-normative forms of employment and household. Moreover, these relations of protection and support often transcend their contractual and temporal nature with practices affirming their deep roots and perpetual regeneration, from ancestral veneration and shrine visitations (Traphagan 2004: 79) to employee memorial services and burial sites (Nakamaki 1995). In this sense, the neoliberal dictum of self-reliance that has permeated various sectors of Japanese society since the late 1990s disguises the relations of care upon which every working and child-bearing citizen relies.

For the underclass, the kinship care (*shinzoku fuyō*) principle in public assistance, along with the Civic Code stipulating the inheritance of ancestral property and graves, tend to aggravate conflicts and increase alienation between family members. Applicants of livelihood protection have to prove to the welfare office that their relatives are incapable of providing care for them, and welfare offices customarily contact parents, siblings, and offspring, who share kinship care duty by law. Such pressure from welfare offices often prompts relatives to further distance themselves from their impoverished kin. Although the relatives are contacted again once the person dies, they tend to decline to claim the body for fear of taking over the debt of the deceased and the burden of performing mortuary rites,[18] and ultimately, for their reluctance to admit the existence of such a kin member (NHK 2010: 109-11). Abandonment during and after death, iconically expressed in decomposed bodies and dilapidated graves, signifies exclusion from the purportedly perpetual relations of care buttressed by the political economy of welfare in Japan.

However, in Kotobuki, doya residents, owing to the necrosocial innovations, attain the status equivalent to that of anonymous ancestors of the collective ancestral world whose wellbeing concerns all the living regardless of familial or individual ties. Such necrosociality extends to their graves.

Collective graves as permanent homes

On 24 December 2011, I attended the funeral of Hayashi Hideo, a Kotobuki resident in his seventies. Born out of wedlock in postwar Japan, Hayashi had difficulty in finding employment, even with his bachelor's degree from a prestigious university.[19] As a result, he migrated to the United States and worked for the military, until he received a message that his mother was in a critical condition. He returned to Japan to take care of her, but following her death he became jobless and eventually homeless. From there, he followed the well-trodden path to Kotobuki and, persuaded and assisted by one of the homeless support groups, the Kotobuki District Centre, he applied for welfare assistance and found a place to stay in a doya. He subsequently became a dedicated member of the Naka Mission Centre, the church affiliated with the Kotobuki District Centre. It was the church members who, concerned about Hayashi's rare absence from Sunday worship, found him collapsed in his room having suffered a stroke. They took him to hospital, but he soon passed away. A church member contacted his sister who lived nearby, but she refused to see his body, so the staff of the Kotobuki District Centre organized the funeral service. At the funeral, there were about forty attendants, many of them church members and a few other Kotobuki residents. Pastor Watanabe of the Naka Mission Centre gave the memorial speech: 'Life is like a tent used by the homeless granted to us by God. When God calls us, we disassemble the tent to move into the permanent home that God had prepared for us'. At the end of this part of the ceremony, the attendants lined up and took turns in offering white chrysanthemums to Hayashi in his coffin to bid their last farewell.

The second part of the funeral took place at Kuboyama Crematorium, which concluded with the placing of Hayashi's cremains in a mortuary urn, a practice known as kotsuage. The attendants lined up, this time in pairs with large chopsticks to pick up Hayashi's bone fragments. The chopsticks were passed from one pair to another as Hayashi's remains filled up the urn. The urn was then taken back to the district, and a few months later the cremains were interred in a communal grave at a Buddhist temple named Tokuonji, twenty kilometres northwest of Kotobuki. Although Hayashi had drifted from one place to another throughout his life, he found his permanent home at Tokuonji via Kotobuki.

The collaboration with Tokuonji temple[20] in securing a final resting place for the homeless is considered to be one of the biggest triumphs of local activism in Kotobuki, which did not have a proper memorial or burial site for its residents for two decades of its postwar history. Some of the earliest records that I found from the 1960s and 1970s included reports of a memorial service (*tsuizen hōyō*) commissioned by a shipping company at a local Nichiren Buddhist temple for a Kotobuki dockworker who died at their worksite,[21] and spontaneous memorial gatherings by day labourers after a massive fire in the district[22] or during the annual 'Winter Survival Struggle' (*ettō tōsō*)[23] (Nomoto

1977: 49-50). None of the nearby Buddhist temples got involved in taking charge of the deceased in Kotobuki until Tokuonji took on this role. According to the present abbot of Tokuonji, it was a complaint by a Kotobuki day labourer that monks don't chant a single sutra for people like him that moved his predecessor and father, Kano Yūshō, to take the lead. For two and a half years, Kano Yūshō and his eldest son Yūkan solicited offerings from people in Kotobuki to erect a statue of J*izō* (a merciful bodhisattva) as a memorial stupa for all those who die alone.[24] In 1978, the statue of *Jizō* was finally erected at the corner of the central plaza next to the municipal housing, yet soon afterwards the city authorities ordered its removal on the charge of illegal appropriation of public land. In protest, people formed a human circle around the statue and squatted there for several days until the order was revoked. Since then, a memorial service has been held every year at Obon at the *Jizō* by Kano Yūshō, and later by his son Yūkan, consisting of a recitation of the han*'nya shingyō* (Prajñāpāramitā, The Heart Sutra) with incense offered by the mourners as the abbot recites the names of those who have died in the past year. The service takes about twenty minutes and ends with a segaki offering of a thousand bowls of curry rice distributed by the parishioners of Tokuonji to the residents of Kotobuki, in this way providing consolation for both the living and the dead.

However, it was only after the collapse of the bubble economy and in the waning days of labour activism that Tokuonji came to provide an actual gravesite for those in Kotobuki. It was established in honour of the late Kawase Seiji, who had dedicated his life to fighting for the rights of those in Kotobuki as vice chairman of the Kotobuki Day Labourers' Union and died in an accident on a construction site.[25] The Union sued the construction company and eventually received a settlement of 3,500,000 yen for his death, which Kawase's family decided to donate to Tokuonji. With this money, a sizeable granite tombstone dedicated to the dead of Kotobuki and engraved with the words 'The Hill of a Thousand Autumns' *(senshū no o*ka) was erected on high ground in the cemetery of Tokuonji in the autumn of 1991. As a result, Kotobuki residents could visit the grave every year at the spring and autumnal equinoxes in addition to attending the Obon memorial service in the central plaza.

When I visited Tokuonji during the autumnal equinox in 2011 with a group of thirty or so others from Kotobuki and a few volunteers, the abbot Kano Yūkan was away in northeastern Japan to offer voluntary service to the earthquake and tsunami victims. Regardless, without being disturbed, everyone proceeded to do the job as usual. After cleaning and festooning the tombstone with extraordinary care, everyone took turns to offer incense and bow their heads in front of the grave. As the official ceremony ended, some walked around to pay their respects to several other family tombstones of the activists who dedicated their lives to Kotobuki, while a few others gazed at the fields feeling the autumn breeze, as if to familiarize themselves with the land in which they would settle after death. Located away from the bustle of the city and surrounded by forests, fields, and streams running through farmhouses, Tokuonji contained all the elements of satoyama (lit. mountain of village, countryside), an archetypal rural landscape cherished by Japanese,[26] and indeed a rightful place to rest in peace. On my short return visit to Kotobuki in 2014, I learned that two of the people who had accompanied me that day had recently been interred there.

While 'The Hill of a Thousand Autumns' was mainly occupied by the cremains of those who had been closely affiliated with the Kotobuki Day Labourers' Union, other organizations, such as the Kotobuki Welfare Workshop and the Kotobuki Seniors' Club, also began to use the grave for their deceased members. Most recently in 2012, the Donkey's House (Roba no ie), a sheltered workshop for the mentally ill, obtained formal approval from Tokuonji to bury their members there. The director of the Donkey's House told me that they had been burying the unclaimed cremains of their members there on an ad hoc basis, but receiving formal approval from Tokuonji was important as it reassured members who were worried that they might become muenbotoke. In a similar vein, the director of the Kotobuki Welfare Workshop explained to me the significance of the grave as follows:

> We organize the funerals ourselves, making rice balls, constructing the altars and so on, so that the abbot from Tokuonji can come and chant the sutras. The fact that we do everything ourselves gives our members a sense of reassurance (anshinkan). They know that wherever they die – in the nursing home, the hospital or their room – the workshop members will take care of their funeral. Before the grave at Tokuonji was established, we avoided asking our members what we should do when they die, but now we can casually ask in advance, as everyone is buried there. We often joke about how the workshop in this life is the First Workshop (dai-ichi), after which people move on to the Second, and the Third, and so on in the next life. Since we now have more deceased than living members, we joke that we will have to start making reservations in the Fourth Workshop, as the others are already full! Death will come one day, but we can live day by day until that day comes, just as though we are moving from the First Workshop to the Fourth.[27]

While the members of the Kotobuki Welfare Workshop, as the oldest sheltered workshop in the district, represented one of the largest groups buried at Tokuonji, permission to be buried there is not dependent upon any particular affiliation with the temple or with any other group. Anyone can be buried there without charge, as long as there is someone to make the request on his or her behalf upon his/her death. Hence, it does not matter that the Donkey's House or the Kotobuki Welfare Workshop are funded by Protestant Christians and that their members may be affiliated with other Buddhist denominations or with Christianity. Long-term activists, from the left-wing Christian director of the Kotobuki Welfare Workshop to the atheist activist of the Kotobuki Day Labourers' Union, would often say that they would rather be buried in the communal grave at Tokuonji than their own family grave. Tokuonji also accepts other muen ashes, such as those from the San'ya district of Tokyo and those of foreign migrant workers. According to the current abbot, more than 500 cremains had been buried in 'The Hill of a Thousand Autumns' as of July 2014.[28]

The development of communal burial and memorial practices in Kotobuki is a demonstration of alternative mortuary practices in Japan that challenge the oppositional relationship between *yūe*n and muen and the way that personhood (Mauss 1985) is maintained. Unlike familial mortuary rituals that reinforce the vertical continuity of ties between living descendants and their ancestors along hereditary lines that can be traced back to time immemorial, the emphasis in Kotobuki is on the horizontal extensibility of

ties that connect the living and the dead. As such, the transformation of Kotobuki into a 'welfare town' that defends the right of survival of its residents involved changing entrenched views of relationships and personhood. During the heyday of labour activism in Kotobuki, survival meant collectively embodying the retaliatory spirit of muenbotoke with their power to come back to haunt the world of *yūe*n and subvert it. It was for this very reason that some labour activists argued against the idea of building a proper communal grave, including the late Kawase Seiji, who noted in his journal as early as 1984 that 'if we have a system of conveying anyone who dies in Kotobuki to a communal grave …then we might lose the attitude of actively trying to commemorate the deceased. That way, we might end up being real muen' (Kawase 1994). However, with the prolonged recession and rapid ageing of the population, Kotobuki witnessed a multitude of deaths without the return of vengeful spirits. As one caseworker put it, 'People come to Kotobuki to die' (Sudō 2004: 158). It was only with the construction of the communal graves described previously that it became possible to gain a new personhood based on relations predicated on a common fate of isolated death. Such a personhood was embodied by people in their solitary but well-connected doya rooms while alive and then in communal graves with their ashes mixed together after death.

Events in Kotobuki illustrate how the governmentality of modern nation-states presupposes particular configurations of relations in enhancing the life of a population. Assumptions made in discussions on the politics of life and death often obscure the fact that life itself is always a relational process – both on the symbolic level, as in the conception of the gift of life that flows from one person to another, and on the material level, as in the burden of care being borne by others – all of which implies particular configurations of relationality. The shifting terms of necrosociality in Kotobuki, I suggest, exemplify the possibility of a different kind of personhood and mode of living that moves beyond the self-managing individuals promoted by neoliberal discourses and the long-held norms of dutiful workers and child-bearing citizens differentially supported by socially prescribed relations. As we have seen, this change has been brought about not by any epistemic rupture, ideological crisis, or religious conversion, but rather by the immediate ritual actions and relations evoked by the material states of the body and the grave, whereby the body resists being reduced to a corpse and the grave resists being dissolved into the landscape.

The most effective way to overcome the ideological dichotomy of *yūen* and muen would be to forgo a grave altogether, for example by scattering the ashes, a practice that is not widespread but has been steadily gaining more advocates among the urbanite elderly population since the 1990s (Kawano 2010). However, collective graves such as 'The Hill of a Thousand Autumns' have adopted a different approach: they integrate muen graves into the harmonious landscape by making them visually indistinguishable from well-attended family graves. What is striking here is that because these collective graves are predicated on the muen (relationless) state of those interred, they are able to promise a permanent connection with the living, unlike the family graves that are in danger of becoming muen when the family line peters out. While the dominant necrosocial bond promoted by the state is dependent on familial ties, as illustrated by the common inscription on tombstones of 'from ancestral generation to generation' (senzo daidai), the communal graves activate a different modality of necrosociality that aims at collective

survival for ‘a thousand autumns’. Such lateral necrosociality constitutes but one part of the wide spectrum of non-ancestral necrosocial practices which have been growing in Japan since the late 1980s. There are ‘eternal memorial graves’ of various sorts that guarantee that memorial services will be held for an unlimited period of time by a third party regardless of familial or religious affiliation (Rowe 2011: 60-7; Suzuki 2000: 174). There are also various forms of burial under and around trees that create a community of the bereaved who seek to overcome grief through collaborative projects aimed at rehabilitating nature and life (Boret 2014: 131-72). These practices, more willingly explored by people who are excluded from ancestral necrosociality, such as the unmarried, the divorced and those without a male heir, reveal the growing aspiration for relations of care unrestricted by ancestral bonds, and the possibility of replacing them by ecological or other associative ties (Boret 2014: 86-9; Rowe 2011: 59). They demonstrate how the material trajectory of the body after death offers a critical vantage-point from which to question and change the socially prescribed relations of care among the living.

Concluding remarks

You died in the midst of scorching summer heat;
Now the leaves have changed colour,
And the falling rain has turned cold.
Soon the winter will come,
Bringing the Winter Survival Struggle.
You must return to join us in the struggle;
But if you have already crossed the Sanzu River[29]
And your body cannot return,
Come back with your spirit burning red like fire
And light the fuse in the hearts of those struggling alive…
Kawase, your spirit shall never rest in peace

“Don’t Ever Die” by Inokawa Kyo[30]

Kawase Seiji’s funeral urn was placed in Tokuonji during the seven-year lawsuit waged by the Kotobuki Day Labourers’ Union. In the end, Kawase did not return as the blazing fire that the unionists had hoped for, but was peacefully laid to rest in the granite tomb of ‘The Hill of a Thousand Autumns’, inviting all those without other refuge to join him after death. Thanks to Kawase, the dead in Kotobuki today are promised peace and consolation with posthumous names and receive offerings of prayers, flowers, drinks, and sweets. Meanwhile, as various measures are implemented to prevent isolated deaths in doya rooms, living in Kotobuki has come to mean receiving care centred on such a death. The afterlife at Tokuonji or other similar collective graves is but an extension of such a life, and by means of these necrosocial practices, the homeless in Kotobuki survive as anonymous ancestors, who are collectively cared for based on their common condition of being disconnected from familial bonds.

Drawing on the case of Kotobuki, this article has discussed the importance of the materiality of the dead body and its placement in enacting relations of care. In so doing, it has called attention to the politics at work in the modalities of relating to the dead which do not conform to the existing framework of ancestral worship and melancholic mourning. The concept of necrosociality enables us to take into account not only the symbolic system of the afterlife and the biographical details of the dead that connect them to the living, but also the immediate agency of the dead and the material engagement they call for. I suggest that the case of Kotobuki has particular relevance to other contexts where survival is an issue due to unemployment, inaccessible health care, genocide, state terrorism, border-crossings, gang violence, and war, among others.

The power of the state is poignantly displayed in the exposed and decomposing remains of undocumented migrants who died while crossing the US-Mexican border through the Sonoran Desert (De Leon 2015), as well as in the missing bodies of the disappeared (desaparecidos) during the military rules in Chile and Argentina (Robben 2015). Meanwhile, the treatment of dead bodies constitutes an integral part of the daily reproduction of structural violence, as in the removal of coffins from budget-strapped Guatemalan public cemeteries (O'Neill 2012), or in the nonchalance displayed by impoverished Brazilian mothers towards their dying infants and the inverted fetishism of their deaths (Scheper-Hughes 1993). Bones and skeletons appear at the centre of projects redrawing the boundaries of the state and the nation (Verdery 1999) and redressing massacres and wars (Kwon 2008; Lincoln & Lincoln 2015; Nelson 2015; Wagner 2015). Contestation over material engagement with the dead also extends to ritual practices surrounding mortuary objects such as dolls (Schattschneider 2005), gravestone inscriptions and ancestral effigies (Mueggler 2001; 2014), and gifts for the deceased (Langford 2013).

The material process that the dead body and associated objects go through in these various circumstances, I suggest, decisively exhibits and enacts the power of the state while also providing the ground on which to negotiate and transform state-sanctioned socialities. Whether a dead body remains intact or is dismembered, goes missing or is displayed, is excavated or cremated, or is moved from one place to another is foundational in reinvigorating or subduing particular modalities of necrosociality which shape the relations of care that are crucial in sustaining the existential conditions for survival. By examining how the dead maintain ties with the living, the concept of necrosociality helps chart the differential relations of care expressed in the social transformation of the body and its traces after death.

Notes

I am grateful to Matei Candea and four anonymous reviewers for their generous and thoughtful comments. This article has benefited from the insights of members of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan: Nishaant Choksi, Haydar Darici, Krisztina Fehervary, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, Hayeon Lee, Scotty MacLochlainn, Erik Mueggler, Damani Partridge and members of the EthnoLab 2014, Jennifer

Robertson, Perry Sherouse, Andrew Shryock, and Stuart Strange. In Japan, I am deeply indebted to Doi Hiroshi, Tom Gill, Glenda Roberts, David Slater, and Yamamoto Kahoruko for their invaluable support. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to Kano Yūkan of Tokuonji, Matsumoto Ichirō of Kotobuki Communal Clinic's Archive and many others in Kotobuki for their help and hospitality without which this project could not have been completed.

This project has been funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Ilju Academy and Culture Foundation, the Center for Japanese Studies and the Rackham Graduate School of the University of Michigan, the Japan Anthropology Workshop and the Toshiba International Foundation.

For people's names, I have followed the Japanese order of the family name followed by the given name. I have used pseudonyms for my informants except for those who gave me permission to use their real names.

---

[1] Tom Gill's ethnography provides a vivid account of day labourers in Kotobuki in the 1990s (Gill 2001), while Carolyn Stevens' ethnography describes various support activities by volunteers in Kotobuki during the same period (Stevens 1997).

[2] Ubasute, or occasionally obasute, refers to the custom of leaving an elderly relative on a mountain or other remote place to die of hunger and cold. The elderly might also go there voluntarily to relieve the burden on the rest of their family and community. It is debatable how widely such a custom was observed, but stories related to ubasuteyama exist in various versions in many parts of Japan (Traphagan 2000: 150).

[3] The term, necrosociality, has been used in a narrow sense by scholars working on popular media and literature about zombies to indicate how zombies threaten the living by reproducing 'sociality itself as a kind of zymotic disease' (Jones & McGlotten 2014: 4). I propose to use the term in a broader sense to emphasize how sociality among the living is inherently intertwined with engagement with the dead.

[4] In line with the discussion on care in medical anthropology (Kleinman 2009; Mol 2008; Mol et al. 2010), I shape my analysis of care around the sharing of responsibility and sensibility necessary for survival among various entities.

[5] Building upon the Household Registration (koseki) Law of 1871, the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 established the ie (patrilineal household) as a legal entity to which every subject must belong under the authority of its male head (Gluck 1985: 186–8; Plath 1964: 308). Although, the word ie was removed in postwar changes to the civil code in 1951, the patrilineal household retained its institutional basis in the household registry system along with various stipulations regarding the inheritance of ancestral property (Rowe 2011: 25), nationality and citizenship (Chapman & Krogness 2014).

[6] The idea of containing and controlling an unruly underclass in a licensed district can be traced back to the late eighteenth century in Japan (Botsman 2005). Such urban governance, with its elements of correction, moral suasion, and welfare, continued to a certain degree in the designated day labourers' districts (yoseba), which emerged in the major cities in postwar Japan, from San'ya in Tokyo to Kamagasaki in Osaka, in response to the demands of the burgeoning economy in construction and dock work.

[7] For more on the history of Kotobuki, see Gill (2001: 47-9) and Stevens (1997: 22-50).

[8] According to the city's 2012 statistics, of the total population of 6,620 in Kotobuki, 80 per cent were welfare recipients, 98% were doya residents, 96 per cent were single-men households, and 63 per cent were over 60 years of age (Kotobuki Fukushi Puraza 2012).
[9] Interview on 15 November 2011.
[10] The notion of ritual pollution (kegare) which derived from Buddhist and Shinto traditions has been historically influential in Japan, generating taboos relating to blood and death and justifying the stigmatization of the outcaste Burakumin, who specialized in tasks such as butchering, leatherwork, and execution in the Tokugawa period (Ooms 1996: 249-70). Scholars have noted that the notion of pollution due to the impurity of 'mixed blood' (Robertson 2002: 194-8) or contact with 'the outside' (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984: 26) remains today, as can be seen in wide-ranging discrimination against various ethnic and socio-economic minorities from Japanese Brazilians (Tsuda 1998: 337-45) to the homeless (Picone 2011: 5).
[11] 'Muen bukkoshaga 20 nen mae no 3.7 bai – Yokohama-shi' (Ashes without relatives: 3.7 times more than 20 years ago in Yokohama), Yomiuri Shinbun, 30 December 2010, p.21.
[12] As a highly taboo subject in Japan, muenbotoke requires a careful approach and much sensitivity. Although many activists and supporters reported to me how the widespread concerns over muenbotoke led them to take actions, I found it extremely difficult to directly inquire of Kotobuki residents about muenbotoke. It is my understanding that confessions of fear of becoming muenbotoke are made in confidence between people, in which it is expected that the listener will take care of the speaker after his or her death. Thus, residents of Kotobuki were less willing to discuss their concerns about their afterlife with me than with long-term activists and supporters who could make the funerary arrangements for them. As a temporary visitor to Kotobuki, I decided not to disturb these confidences, but rather to trace how these concerns manifest in various practices in Kotobuki.
[13] Voluntary and municipal mimamori programmes (mimamori literally means 'to watch over') were first adopted in a number of public apartment complexes in the 1970s, encouraging community members to regularly visit the elderly living alone in the neighbourhood to check their wellbeing. These programmes gained wider recognition and popularity following the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 and are attracting renewed attention today in relation to isolated death (Allison 2013:122-165; Yūki 2014).
[14] Interview on 25 August 2011.
[15] Conversation on 23 August 2011.
[16] The home-help system became affordable for households with senior citizens over 65 with the implementation in 2000 of the long-term care insurance in Japan. Although Kotobuki used to be avoided by home-help companies, their number has increased and as of 2014, there were six helper stations within and around the district.
[17] According to Amino Yoshihiko, towards the end of the medieval period in Japan, muen lost its positive Buddhist connotation of being free from the influence of secular power and only retained its negative implication of being excluded, marginalized and abandoned (Amino 1996: 258).
[18] Expenses of mortuary rituals have increased significantly with the commercialization of the funeral industry (Suzuki 2000: 70-5) and the financial difficulty of Buddhist temples in maintaining gravesites (Rowe 2011: 47).

[19] Children born out of wedlock in Japan were marked with a Chinese character in the household registry (koseki) until 2004, leading to potential discrimination against them in regard to marriage and employment (Hertog 2009).
[20] Tokuonji belongs to the Shingon (True Word) denomination of Buddhism of the Mount *Kōya* in Wakayama Prefecture. Shingon, along with the Tendai denomination, is known to be more open to non-ancestral and non-human mortuary rituals than other denominations, such as Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land School).
[21] 'Aru Kotobuki rōdōsha no shi' (The death of a Kotobuki labourer), Kotobuki Shinbun, No. 10, 1 June 1969, p.2.
[22] 'Kotobuki jūmin no tsudoi' (A gathering of Kotobuki residents), Kotobuki Shinbun, No. 7, 1 March 1969, p.1.
[23] The Winter Survival Struggle is staged annually at yoseba districts by day labourers' unions during the New Year's holidays when work and welfare assistance are hard to get. As yoseba scholar Aoki Hideo once noted, the Winter Survival Struggle offered a liminal time/space for day labourers and the homeless during which 'the living encounter each other as "comrades" through the dead' (Aoki 1988).
[24] According to Kano, Buddhist temples were busy with high demand for funeral services at the time, so most did not consider taking on extra work without a fee. However, Tokuonji's activities in Kotobuki gathered media attention and over time the temple started to receive donations from sympathizers across Japan. In response to increasing attention and support, Tokuonji devised a supporter membership programme to complement the conventional danka system (the inherited parishioner membership of local households), so that people without ancestral ties to Tokuonji could establish a connection with the temple and support its activities. Such an innovative approach proved beneficial to Tokuonji and spared it from the financial problems that afflict many Buddhist temples today. (Interview on 29 May 2014.)
[25] Kawase Seiji's life and death is detailed in the commemorative anthology Kawase Seiji-kun tsuitō bunshū henshū i'inkai (1985).
[26] For more on satoyama, see Boret (2014: 29-30).
[27] Interview on 24 May 2014.
[28] Notably, there are also other new communal graves run by organizations affiliated with Kotobuki, such as Into the Light owned by Shalom's House, a sheltered workshop for people with mental disabilities, and Everyone's Grave, owned by a non-profit organization, Sora (lit. sky), which manages two sheltered workshops. Similarly, in San'ya district, a homeless support organization, Sanyūkai (San'ya's friends group), succeeded in raising 2.55 million yen to build a communal gravesite through online crowd-funding. Meanwhile, in Kamagasaki district, it was a Catholic-based organization, Furusato no Ie (lit. hometown house), which pioneered offering memorial services and a columbarium for day labourers and the homeless in the 1990s (Shirahase 2014: 109). The Isshinji temple of the Pure Land school in the vicinity is famous for its century-long practice of building statues of Amitabha Buddha every ten years from the cremains entrusted to them; however, it is unknown how many cremains of local underclass people are incorporated into the statues today (Picone 2011: 5; Rowe 2011: 48-9).
[29] Sanzu River, or the River of Three Crossings, is the river believed to divide this world and the afterlife in Japanese Buddhist tradition.
[30] Kawase Seiji-kun tsuitō bunshū henshū i'inkai (1985: 9-10).

REFERENCES

AGAMBEN, G. 1998. Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life. Stanford: University Press.

ALLISON, A. 2013. Precarious Japan. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

AMINO, Y. 1996. *Muen, kugai, raku: nihon chūsei no jiyū to heiwa* [Muen, kugai, raku: freedom and peace in medieval Japan]. Tokyo: Heibonsha.

AOKI, H. 1988. Seisha to shisha no taiwa -- Kamagasaki ettō tōsō kara (A dialogue between the living and the dead: from the Kamagasaki Winter Struggle). *Kaihō* Shakai-gaku Kenky*ū* **2** 8–24.

BIEHL, J. 2005. Vita: Life in a zone of social abandonment. Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press.

BLOCH, M. & J. PARRY 1982. Death and the regeneration of life. Cambridge: University Press.

BORET, S.P. 2014. Japanese tree burial: ecology, kinship and the culture of death. London: Routledge.

BOTSMAN, D.V. 2005. Punishment and power in the making of modern Japan. Princeton: University Press.

CHAPMAN, D. & K.J. KROGNESS (eds) 2014. *Japan's household registration system and* citizenship: koseki, identification and documentation. Abingdon: Routledge.

DE LEON, J. 2015. The Land of Open Graves: living and dying on the migrant trail. Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press.

GARON, S. 1998. Molding Japanese minds. Princeton: University Press.

GILL, T. 2001. Men of uncertainty: the social organization of day laborers in contemporary Japan. Albany: State University of New York Press.

GLUCK, C. 1985. Jap*an's modern myths: ideology in the late Meiji period*. Princeton: University Press.

HASEGAWA, M. 2006. 'We are not garbage!': The homeless movement in Tokyo 1994-2002. New York: Routledge.

HERTOG, E. 2009. Tough choices: bearing an illegitimate child in contemporary Japan. Stanford: University Press.

HERTZ, R. 1960. Death and the right hand. London: Routledge.

IKEGAMI, Y. 2014. Shūkyōgaku no kenkyū kadai toshite no ‘segaki’ [The ‘segaki’ buddhist service for the benefit of suffering ghosts as a subject of religious studies]. Komazawa Daigaku Bunka **32**, 69–94.

JONES, S. & S. MCGLOTTEN 2014. Introduction: zombie sex. In Zombies and sexuality: essays on desire and the living dead (eds) S. McGlotten & S. Jones, 1-18. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.

KAWANO, S. 2010. Na*ture's embrace: Japan's a*ging urbanites and new death rites. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

KAWASE, K. 1994. ‘Muen’ no hitobito no kyōdō bochi: ‘Senshū no oka’ san shūnen ni omou [The communal grave of ‘muen’ people: on the third anniversary of ‘The Hill of a Thousand Autumns’]. *Rōdō Jōhō* (available on-line: http://www4.plala.or.jp/kawa-k/hihyou/SENNSY~1.HTM, accessed 29 July 2016).

KAWASE SEIJI-KUN TSUITŌ BUNSHŪ HENSHŪ I'INKAI (ed) 1985. Kotobuki ni ikite: Kawase *Seiji kun tsuitō bunshū* [Living in Kotobuki: an anthology of essays commemorating Kawase Seiji]. Yokohama: Kawase Seiji-kun tsuitō bunshū henshū i'inkai.

KENNEY, E. 2004. Pet funerals and animal graves in Japan. Mortality **9**, 42–60.

KLEINMAN, A. 2009. Caregiving: the odyssey of becoming more human. The Lancet **373**, 292–3.

KOTOBUKI FUKUSHI PURAZA 2012. Kotobuki fukushi puraza *sōdanshitsu Heisei 24 nendo gyōmu no gaiyō* [Kotobuki Welfare Plaza Counselling Centre 2012 business outline]. Yokohama: Yokohamashi Kenkō Fukushikyoku Seikatsu Fukushibu Hogoka Kotobuki Chiku Taisaku Tantō.

KWON, H. 2008. Ghosts of war in Vietnam. Cambridge: University Press.

LANGFORD, J. M. 2013. Consoling ghosts: stories of medicine and mourning from Southeast Asians in exile. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

LINCOLN, M. & B. LINCOLN 2015. Toward a critical hauntology: bare afterlife and the ghosts of Ba Chúc. Comparative Studies in Society and History **57**, 191-220.

LOCK, M. 2001. Twice dead: organ transplants and the reinvention of death. Berkeley: University of California Press.

MAUSS, M. 1985. A category of the human mind: the notion of person; the notion of self. In The category of the person: anthropology, philosophy, history (eds) M. Carrithers, S. Collins & S. Lukes, 1–25. Cambridge: University Press.

MOL, A. 2008. The logic of care: health and the problem of patient choice. London: Routledge.

————, I. MOSER & J. POLS 2010. Care in practice: on tinkering in clinics, homes and farms. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

MUEGGLER, E. 2001. The age of wild ghosts: memory, violence, and place in Southwest China. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———— 2014. Corpse, stone, door, text. The Journal of Asian Studies **73**, 17-41.

NAKAMAKI, H. 1995. Memorial monuments and memorial services of Japanese companies: focusing on Mount Kōya. In Ceremony and ritual in Japan: religious practices in an industrialized society (eds) J. van Bremen & D.P. Martinez, 146-60. London: Routledge.

NELSON, C.T. 2015. Listening to the bones: the rhythms of sacrifice in contemporary Japan. boundary 2 **42**, 143–55.

NHK 2010. Muen s*hakai: 'muenshi' sanman nisennnin no shōgeki* [Relationless society: the shock of 32,000 relationless deaths] Tokyo: Bungei Shunshu.

NOMOTO, S. 1977. Seikatsu-*kan nōto* [The livelihood hall notebook]. Tokyo: Tabata Shoten.

OHNUKI-TIERNEY, E. 1984. Illness and culture in contemporary Japan: an anthropological view. Cambridge: University Press.

O'NEILL, K.L. 2012. There is no more room: cemeteries, personhood, and bare death. Ethnography **13**, 510-30.

OOMS, H. 1996. Tokugawa village practice. Berkeley: University of California Press.

OTANI, J. 2010. Older people in natural disasters: the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. Kyoto: Trans Pacific Press.

PALGI, P. & H. ABRAMOVITCH 1984. Death: a cross-cultural perspective. Annual Review of Anthropology **13**, 385–417.

PICONE, M. 2011. Invisibles de leur vivant, oubliés après leur mort: les cadavres des pauvres et la muen shakai (société des personnes isolées) au Japon, 1–8. Paris, France (available on-line: http://www.reseau-asie.com/colloque/4eme-congres-2011/organisation-sociale-rituels/morts-cadavres-cremation/, accessed 29 July 2016).

PLATH, D.W. 1964. Where the family of god is the family: the role of the dead in Japanese households. American Anthropologist **66**, 300-17.

RABINOW, P. 1996. Essays on the anthropology of reason. Princeton: University Press.

——— & N. ROSE 2006. Biopower today. BioSocieties **1**, 195-217.

ROBBEN, A.C.G.M. 2015. Exhumations, territoriality, and necropolitics in Chile and Argentina. In Necropolitics: mass graves and exhumations in the age of human rights (eds) F. Ferrandiz & A.C.G.M. Robben, 53-75. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

ROBERTSON, J. 2002. Blood talks: eugenic modernity and the creation of new Japanese. History and Anthropology **13**, 191-216.

ROSE, N. 2001. The Politics of Life Itself. Theory, Culture & Society **18**, 1-30.

ROWE, M.M. 2011. Bonds of the dead: temples, burial, and the transformation of contemporary Japanese Buddhism. Chicago: University Press.

SCHATTSCHNEIDER, E. 2001. 'Buy me a bride': death and exchange in northern Japanese bride-doll marriage. American Ethnologist **28**, 854-80.

——— 2005. The bloodstained doll: violence and the gift in wartime Japan. The Journal of Japanese Studies **31**, 329-56.

SCHEPER-HUGHES, N. 1993. Death without weeping: the violence of everyday life in Brazil. Berkeley: University of California Press.

SHIRAHASE, T. 2014. Airin chiiki ni okeru tanshin kōreisha seikatsu to shi: tomurai no jissen o chūshinnni [The livelihood and death of elderly single people in the Airin area: on mortuary practices] Genda*i Shūkyō* 92-114.

SMITH, R.J. 1974. Ancestor worship in contemporary Japan. Stanford: University Press.

STEVENS, C.S. 1997. On the margins of Japanese society: volunteers and the welfare of the urban underclass. London: Routledge.

STRATHERN, A. 1982. Witchcraft, greed, cannibalism and death: some related themes from the New Guinea Highlands. In Death and the regeneration of life (eds) M. Bloch & J. Parry, 111-33. Cambridge: University Press.

SUDŌ, Y. 2004. *Sōsharu wāku no sagyōba: Kotobuki to iu machi* [The workplace of social work: a town called Kotobuki] Tokyo: Seishin Shobō.

SUZUKI, H. 2000. The price of death: the funeral industry in contemporary Japan. Stanford: University Press.

TANAKA, T. 2009. Kotobuki yomoyama banashi [Various topics on Kotobuki] *Kotobukichō Doyagai* **6** 62-88. Yokohama: Kotobuki Kyōdō Shinryōjo Kotobukichō Kankei Shiryōshitsu.

TRAPHAGAN, J.W. 2000. Taming oblivion: aging bodies and the fear of senility in Japan. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———— 2004. The practice of concern: ritual, well-being, and aging in rural Japan. Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press.

TSUDA, T. 1998. The stigma of ethnic difference: the structure of prejudice and 'discrimination' toward Japan's new immigrant minority. Journal of Japanese Studies **24**, 317-59.

VERDERY, K. 1999. The political lives of dead bodies. New York: Columbia University Press.

WAGNER, S.E. 2015. A curious trade: the recovery and repatriation of U.S. missing in action from the Vietnam War. Comparative Studies in Society and History **57**, 161–90.

WATSON, J.L. 1982. Of flesh and bones: the management of death pollution in Cantonese society. In Death and the regeneration of life (eds) M. Bloch & J. Parry, 155-86. Cambridge: University Press.

YŪKI, Y. 2014. Kodokushi no riaru [The reality of isolated death]. Tokyo: Kōdansha.

Note on Contributor

Jieun Kim is a postdoctoral fellow of the Graduate School of East Asian Studies at Freie University Berlin. She received her PhD from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor with her dissertation, The Politics of Survival and Care in Homeless Japan in 2015.

Graduate School of East Asian Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, Hittorfstr.18, 14195 Berlin, Germany. jinikim@zedat.fu-berlin.de