

Death-Scapes in Taipei and Manila: a Postmodern Necrography¹

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This paper analyses changing geographies of disposal in the urban centres of Taipei in Taiwan and Manila in the Philippines, specifically shifts from burial to cremation and the extent to which such shifts reflect changing patterns of residence, fraternity, mobility and conceptions of locality in both places. In this essay the term 'postmodern' will refer not to a body of theory but to material transformations in the structuring of the economy and polity marked by migration from rural areas to cities and the production of places and localities where 'traditional' signs of hierarchy, memory and belonging appear to have been abolished. It has been claimed that the analysis of social practices surrounding death 'throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences' (Huntingdon and Metcalf 1979: 25). However, I shall argue that conventional anthropological approaches to death practices – which tend to focus on ritual rather than the sites of disposal – need radical revision in order to satisfactorily account for the kinds of changes that are specified over the course of this essay. Indeed, the privileged contextual horizon for conventional anthropological and sociological approaches to death, dying and disposal has been the concept of 'culture'. I will argue that the structuring of contemporary death rituals in both Taiwan and the Philippines is not local culture but rather, on the one hand, the modern state that seeks increasingly to intervene and regulate the minutiae of daily life and, on the other, the 'market' which continuously opens up new areas to the grasping hand of capital accumulation.

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This paper analyses changing geographies of disposal in the urban centres of Taipei in Taiwan and Manila in the Philippines, specifically shifts from burial to cremation, and argues that such shifts reflect changing patterns of residence, fraternity, and belonging in both places.² In this essay, then, the term 'postmodern' refers not to a body of theory but to material transformations in the structuring of the economy and polity marked by migration from rural areas to cities and the production of places and localities where 'traditional' signs of hierarchy, memory and belonging appear to have been abolished.

It has been claimed that the analysis of social practices surrounding death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences' (Huntingdon and Metcalf 1979: 25). However, I shall argue that conventional anthropological approaches to death practices – which tend to focus on ritual exchanges between the living and the dead rather than the sites of disposal – need radical revision in order to account satisfactorily for the kinds of changes that are specified over the course of this essay. Indeed, the privileged contextual horizon for conventional anthropological and sociological approaches to death, dying, and disposal has been the concept of 'culture'. I will argue that the structuring of contemporary death rituals in both Taiwan and the Philippines is not local culture but rather, on the one hand, the modern state that seeks increasingly to intervene and regulate the minutiae of daily life and, on the other, the 'market' which continuously opens up new areas to the grasping hand of capital accumulation. Specifically, the question that marks the point of departure for this essay is: when the linkages between communities and specific places are being re-articulated, and when rituals are replaced by secularised transactions, can we sustain the functionalist assumption of stable communities tied to particular locales or territories and the focus on rituals through which social relationships are coded and maintained?

Death and reciprocity in Taiwan

Normative anthropological approaches to death rituals in Taiwan can be classified into three interlocking types. All are defined by a 'functionalist' mode of analysis that ultimately understands the ritual practices surrounding death as instruments of social control and as such focuses on their role in the creation and sustenance of collectively held sentiments and values and the coding of hierarchically structured social relationships (Bloch and Parry 1982: 38-42; Watson 1988: 1-19). For the first type, the study of death rituals reveals that the conception of the spirit-

² It may be that the juxtaposition of Taiwan and the Philippines constitutes a heinous transgression of disciplinary boundaries: the Philippines belongs to the Southeast Asianists while Taiwan to the Sinologists. Indeed, it might be argued that such an arbitrary juxtaposition illuminates only the contingencies of a life – my life – where the boundaries between Taiwan and the Philippines have become confused. Or perhaps it is otherwise: as the logic of area studies crumbles in the face of the interconnectedness of the world, perhaps it is in such juxtapositions, which perhaps owe something to the technique known as 'collage', that different questions can be posed about the sense and meaning of locality in a post-modern world.

world commonly found in Taiwan is a translation, metaphor, or reflection of the imperial bureaucracy – in other words, that the imagining of the imperial state plays a structuring role in the organisation of the spirit world and its articulation with the world of the living (Feuchtwang 1974: 128-129; Wolf 1974: 179; Sangren 1987: 52). For the second type, the study of death rituals discloses an overarching view of the cosmos defined by the concepts *yin* and *yang* through which social hierarchies such as those allegedly extant between men and women, seniors and juniors, living and dead, and ancestors and ghosts are naturalised, legitimated and negotiated (Thompson 1988: 71). For the third type, the analysis of ritual practices surrounding the burial and disposal of the dead opens out onto the vista of an underlying Chinese cultural logic of social reproduction defined in particular by the lineage and the patriline (Freedman 1958: 77). Thus, the imperial state, a conception of the cosmos, and the patri-lineal system of kinship emerge as the formative horizons and units of society and culture in Taiwan. Conventional research into death and disposal in Taiwan has as such assumed that the analysis of death rites provides, as it were, a window through which to discern an underlying and distinctively ‘Chinese’ ‘socio-logic’ (Sangren 2000) or grammar through which society and culture in Taiwan are articulated (Hong and Murray 2005).

In normative accounts of Chinese religious culture, grave sites and the bones interred within the grave are regarded as channels for *qi* or energy that can be transmitted on to the descendents of the dead. However, bones as a source of power and connection are ambivalent: handled inappropriately such sources of power, energy, or potency may cause harm to those who may try to benefit from them. Importantly, the potentialities that the dead have for the living are embedded within a religio-cultural matrix pervasive among Chinese-speaking peoples through which the environment is ascribed, perhaps for want of a better word, ‘sacred’ significance. *Feng shui* – which literally means ‘wind and water’ – refers to practices for the selection of sites for dwellings for both the living and the dead, as well as the correct alignment of elements within and outside the home for the maintenance of the unity and harmony of *yin-yang*:

The dwelling – a house, a grave, a village, a town, or a city – becomes a centre around which the landscape is shaped, the central focus being the gathering point of the landscape’s energies. It becomes a place centred on what the Chinese call *xue*, translated as a ‘lair’ because it is like a cave, the hole within which the dragon of the landscape dwells (Feuchtwang 2004: 166).

The conception of *yin* and *yang* is the imagination of a cosmic order of forces or energies conceived in terms of harmony and equilibrium. Ideally, the human world reflects this cosmic order and, as such, human relationships and behaviour must be carefully observed and regulated to ensure that no transgression of this order occurs. Where transgression does occur, imbalance and dis-equilibrium in the form of calamities, illness, and misfortune are the likely results and, as such, corrective ritual practices must be undertaken to re-establish the concordance of the human realm with the cosmic order. Confucian notions of filial piety (*xiao*) are to be understood as rules and regulations for the maintenance of balance and reciprocity in the human world, in particular relations between juniors and seniors,

women and men but also, and importantly for the purposes of this essay, between the living and the dead.

As such, the living and the dead do not reside in separate realms but rather along an ordered continuum of debts, obligations and reciprocal practices through which the order of the cosmos and the order of human affairs is sustained or nourished through time. Anthropologists and sociologists have produced an invaluable mass of literature that describes this normative 'Chinese' conception of the cosmos, and which claims to reveal 'a unified set of cosmological assumptions' (Sangren 1987: 51) and 'an underlying logic' (Tong 2004: 3) discernible in the practice of so-called ancestor worship or veneration:

From the formal point of view, ancestor worship may be divided into (1) the funeral rites, (2) the mourning observances, and (3) the continuing sacrifices to the *manes* (spirit of the deceased). From the functional point of view, these practices serve to express the grief of the survivors in accepted or ceremonial manner; to help the spirit of the dead in its progress through purgatory; to give peace to the *p'o (yin)* soul in the grave and forestall its becoming a malevolent ghost; to obtain the blessings of the *hun (yang hence shen)* soul for the family; to give the family and lineage a continuing sense of wholeness; and, of course, to demonstrate the love and remembrance – whether real or affected – in which the family continues to hold its deceased members (Thompson 1996: 44-45).

These normative or synchronic snap-shots of a whole Chinese social or cultural logic, however, tend to ignore or deny significant shifts in the organisation and production of landscapes and dwellings for the living and the dead associated with urbanisation and the effect these shifts in spatial ordering have on contemporary rituals relating to ancestor worship and the propitiation of the spirits of the dead generally conceived. Indeed, according to Watson (1988) disposal – the expulsion of the deceased from the community – is only one of nine 'elementary features of Chinese funerary rites' (1988: 15) and, whereas the other eight elements are characterised by considerable diversity, the expulsion of the deceased from the living social group is 'orchestrated with considerable uniformity' (*ibid*). The implication, if one were to take Watson's essay as the point of departure, is that the manner of the disposal of the deceased is a rather unimportant feature of Chinese funerals. However, shifts in the structuring of death and disposal have important consequences for thinking about the articulation of social groups to landscape and for the relations between the living and the dead. Yeoh's historical analysis of burial landscapes in Singapore as '*contested spaces*' (1999: 241) sets out the points of departure that this kind of analysis can take: in 1965 in Singapore the vast majority of Singapore's Chinese dead were buried. However, the number of cremations rose steadily through the 1970s and 1980s. The emergence of state agencies to care for the sick (hospitals), the infirm (care homes), the terminally ill (hospices), and the deceased (funeral directors and local authorities) combined to break the hold of 'tradition' and shifted responsibility for the care of the sick, the handling of the corpse, and the disposal of the dead away from the family and on to the state, and according to Yeoh, central to this process was the erosion of regional, ethnic, and family associations that had previously organised and supervised funeral rites and the maintenance of grave sites. Under the rhetoric of

'national development', burial grounds were closed and cleared for the purposes of development (Yeoh 1999: 244) such that cremation has become the norm. According to Yeoh, this has had significant repercussions on the conduct of rituals that traditionally code relations of reciprocity and obligation between the living and the dead, and as such Yeoh focuses on the micro-tactics employed by ordinary people whereby ritual practices are adjusted to fit the new state-managed structures of death and disposal in Singapore.

Death and reciprocity in the Philippines

Very little scholarly attention has been paid to lowland culture in the Philippines and perhaps even less to death practices. Cannell's *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (1999) constitutes an attempt to rectify this and to challenge the assumption that the peoples of the Christianised lowlands have 'no culture worth the name' (1999: 1) and includes close analysis of Bicolaño conceptions of death, the process of burial and mourning (1999: 137).

According to Cannell, a significant feature of lowland, Christianised culture in the Philippines is the stress placed on negotiation and reciprocity between persons and entities of differing status, which is glossed by Lahiri (2002) as a 'pervasive logic of cultural practice' (2002: 45) that is centred in and around local idioms of exchange, debt, empathy, and pity (in Tagalog, *utang na loób* and *damay*). It is this 'logic' that, according to Cannell, defines the relationships between the living and the dead. A typical funeral procession proceeds from the house of the deceased with the coffin to a Requiem Mass at the local Catholic Church where the body and the coffin are sprinkled with holy water and incense and then on to the cemetery, which is usually situated outside of town, for the burial (Cannell 1999: 147). The priest rarely accompanies the coffin to the site of internment unless paid to do so. The early Spanish sources suggest that Filipinos believed that the dead passed into an afterlife located at the end of a long river journey and that the virtuous dead would enter a 'village of rest' while the non-virtuous would pass to 'a place of punishment, grief, and affliction' (Plascencia O.S.F. in Blair and Robertson Vol. VII 1903-1909: 195-196). With the arrival of the Spanish and the evangelisation of lowland populations, Filipinos were introduced to the notions of heaven, hell, and sin. According to Rafael (1993), evangelisation transformed the notion of indebtedness by conceptualising all persons as in need of the protection of God. Heaven was understood as a site of non-predatory exchange in accordance with an ideal hierarchy drawn between human beings and God, while hell was envisioned as 'exclusion from divine patronage' (Rafael 1993: 179). Heaven and hell, then, were understood by Filipinos very much in terms of local idioms of exchange and negotiation.

A significant feature of funerals among lowland Filipinos is the embalming of the corpse, its display in the coffin at the wake, and the importance placed on its appearance, particularly the concern that any marks of violence, anger, or discomfort be absent. Embalming involves the removal of the stomach and the blood from the body. It appears that pre-Hispanic Filipinos also embalmed their dead and decorated the corpse in order to protect it from attack by a spirit known as an *aswang* which is said to feed on body fluids and is thought to prey on the sick and the newly dead. Embalming is also thought to prevent the 'soul' of the

deceased from returning (Cannell 1999: 150-151). As such, Filipinos distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' deaths, with the latter denoting drawn out or sudden deaths which imply notions of sin, unpaid debts, and the possible presence of an *aswang*. Filipinos also, according to Cannell, believe that the spirit or soul of the dead can haunt family members and *anting-anting* or amulets may be worn to protect living family members from the unwelcome and dangerous attention of the dead (Cannell 1999: 154).

Critically, one of the most important ritual occasions in lowland Filipino culture is the annual visit to the cemetery held on All Souls' Day, on 1 November. It is believed that the spirits or souls of the dead return at this time and so families go to the tombs of their relatives to keep vigil at the grave, to share food together and to offer food and prayers to the deceased and to clean the cemetery. The dead may not return to the dwelling places of the living but, once a year, the living may visit the dead in their dwelling places.

In my experience, lowland Filipinos rarely talk about heaven or hell when asked about what happens after death, unless prompted to do so. As Cannell notes (1999: 162), they are more concerned with the relationships between the living and dead, and the importance of their effective separation: too much emotion either side might cause the return of the spirit of the dead or for that matter for a living person to seek death. As Cannell puts it, 'death should mark the moment when the debts of the living and the dying person to each other are settled' (1999: 163) and the embalming of the corpse, its blessing by the priest, internment, and the yearly visit to the graveyard at All Souls are all elements of a logic of reciprocity through which the living and the dead learn co-existence. Further, the beautification of the corpse and the importance placed on the wake and on having a large and noisy funeral all function to transform the newly dead at least temporarily into a patron whose *largesse* attracts followers. Cannell's account – and its veracity is not in question – is intended to reveal an underlying logic to lowland, Christianised culture in the Philippines. But I would suggest that a focus on the changing geography of death leads to some rather more nuanced conclusions.

The new geographies of death in Taipei and Manila

In this section of the essay I will focus on the new 'death-scapes' as evidence for change in the materialisation of space and place in terms of national and global processes of state-sponsored or entrepreneurial re-structuring and re-territorialisation (Eliade 1959; Appadurai 1996; Kong 1999; Gupta and Ferguson 2001; Feuchtwang 2004).³ In Taipei, pressures of land-scarcity and patterns of

³ See also the social geographical approach to Taiwan taken by Knapp (1999) and Edmonds (2001). Knapp argues that 'Taiwan [...] has traversed a development path that has strikingly altered its natural environment and given shape to cultural landscapes that resonate both an inherited Chinese character and international elements' (Knapp 1999:4). By contrast, Edmonds suggests that "globalisation" can be seen as part of the process of "Taiwanisation" (2001:18). Also of interest is Yip's (2004) exploration of the town: country opposition and its mediation in Taiwan's literature and cinema. Yip traces a trajectory from nostalgia for a rural *gemeinschaft* in the *xiang tu* literature of Huang Chun-ming to the more

migration from countryside to city environments suggest that patterns of residence, fraternity, and belonging are shifting: government legislation has been enacted to force residents to dispose of their dead in ways that ease the pressure on the land as a resource for planning and development. As such, for most Taipei residents coffin burial in a permanent grave is no longer an option, except for those wealthy enough to be able to return their dead to ancestral villages in China. In Manila, while similar pressures of land scarcity exist and where there are comparable patterns of migration from rural areas to urban areas, it is entrepreneurs, often in collaboration with parishes or missionary Orders rather than state agencies, that have stepped in to finance and construct new crematoria and columbaria for the storage of ash-urns.

Before 1983 in Taipei, the disposal of the dead was completely unregulated by the state or by local government, and it was perfectly legal for a family to select a plot of land and use it as a burial site. Since 1983, this practice has been increasingly subject to regulation by the state. In a meeting with the Section Head of Taipei City Government's Mortuary Services Division on September 15 2004, we learned that about twenty years ago the local government began encouraging Taipei residents to cremate their dead by offering cremation and accommodation in a government-run columbarium free of charge. Since 1999 this policy has changed, and these services must now be paid for by the family of the deceased. The city government runs two crematoriums, two columbaria for the storage of ash-urns, and two graveyards, though only the graveyard at Fude to the south of Taipei still has space. Underground burial at Fude costs NT\$220,000. However, after seven years – the time at which the deceased would conventionally be exhumed and the bones cleaned and collected in preparation for secondary burial – the grave plot returns to local government ownership. There were fifty-three further graveyards in Taipei, although these are being cleared gradually as the city expands. Since 1989, burial in any of these graveyards has been forbidden by law. Nine have since been removed, three have been partially cleared, and two have been converted into parks.

The local government is also attempting to promote three new methods of disposal: these are 'tree burial', 'flower burial', and 'sea burial', and these new forms of disposal were justified to us precisely in terms of the saving of land/space. Thus, in our interview with the Head of the Mortuary Services Office at Taipei Funeral Home No. 2 on September 22 2004, we were informed that while 100 square metres of land could (only) accommodate approximately 25 underground burials, the same area could accommodate around 400 flower

ambivalent representations of rural and urban life in the films of Hou Hsiao-hsien. With regard to the Philippines, Hedman and Sidel (2000) argue, with regard to the boom in the construction of shopping malls in Manila that 'malls have tended to create hermetically sealed "city-within-a-city" utopias remote and removed from traditional Philippine small-town plazas or urbanised "downtowns" with all their reminders of secular and ecclesiastical power hierarchies, social fragmentation, and political struggles. By the same token, the malls have also increasingly threatened to vacate the old city centres and, as a result, empty notions of national citizenship from the kind of lived experiences without which subaltern historical memory fades and the collective will for political change languishes' (2000:133).

burials or in the region of 30,000 ash-urns stored in a columbarium. Local government officials have estimated that the local government columbaria will be full twenty years from now and, given that there are at present no plans to build any more, there is a need to develop new methods of disposal (However, an official at the Mortuary Services Office would later inform us that there are about forty privately-run columbaria in Taipei, most of which are owned and run by Buddhist organisations). As such, these new burial practices have been available free of charge since November 2003. Importantly, these methods of disposal were developed as a result of enquiries into disposal practices in Australia. Until the date of the meeting there had been 128 so-called tree burials, five flower burials, and five sea burials. By the end of April 2006, these numbers had increased to 426, 19, and 52, respectively. Sea burial involves taking the ashes of the deceased some sixty kilometers out into international waters and scattering them into the sea. If flower burial is chosen, the ashes are simply scattered over a flower bed. Tree burial involves placing the ashes of the deceased in a bio-degradable container which is then 'planted' under a tree. Three kinds of container are available to choose from: one is plain, another is decorated with Buddhist/Confucian imagery, and a third kind features Christian symbolism. In these latter instances, these burials occur in a garden specially designated and managed by the local government for this purpose. Interestingly, in July 2004 Taipei local government approached the local district authorities in the city asking them to select local garden areas for tree and flower burial. The response to this request was overwhelmingly negative. The reason given for this was that such garden-grave sites would constitute a transgression of the fundamental notion that the living and the dead should occupy differentiated dwelling spaces.

We visited the garden and, like a traditional graveyard, it is situated well away from the dwellings of the living next to Fude Ling Gu Lou in the hills to the south of the city. Interestingly, it is referred to not as '*gong mu*' which means 'graveyard' but as 'Sheng Ming Ji Nian Yuan' which means 'Garden for the Commemoration of Life'. Nearby, a park has been built. The point to note here is the perhaps less than subtle attempt by the authorities to try to transform, through re-naming, the prevailing conception of the dead. Death is neutralised into a remembering that conjures no special prohibitions or fears. On a wall encircling the garden are plaques bearing the names and dates of the deceased buried there. An inspection of the plaques showed that those buried in this garden consisted largely of distant or forgotten ancestors, children, those who had died 'bad' or anomalous deaths, and Christians. This again is significant: the majority of these dead fall outside the coded form of remembering that ancestor worship prescribes. The low take-up rate for these new garden burials and the types of dead buried therein suggest that Taipei residents are as yet unwilling to accept or adopt such measures for the disposal of those considered to be ancestors.⁴ Indeed, the geomancer introduced to me by my field-work assistant was positively appalled at the prospect of these new forms of burial but also at a perceived double-standard: wealthy families are allegedly still able to bury their dead underground while the mass of ordinary people must make do with a mode of disposal somewhat less auspicious and,

⁴ However, there are now plans to develop a second much larger memorial garden near the current site by October 2006.

from his point of view, positively detrimental to their well-being. Other individuals articulated similar sentiments, suggesting a class-status axis in Taiwan that seems most readily visible to upwardly mobile Taipei'ers.

We also visited two columbaria, one managed by the Zhongtaishan Buddhist organisation at Wan li in Taipei county, northeastern Taiwan called 'Tian Xiang' or 'Heavenly Fortune' while the other, also at Fude, is managed by the local government. The local government columbarium at Fude houses two types of urn: bone-ash urns of which they had 61,967 in September 2004, increasing to 68,339 by April 2006, and secondary burial urns which numbered 22,457 in September 2004 and which had increased to 22,891 by April 2006. The total number of urns stored was 91,230, with a total capacity for 108,732. At the Zhongtaishan Columbarium 'Tian Xiang', there are some 30,000 spirit tablets of family lineages, spirit tablets of individuals, and spirit tablets for *yuan qin zhai zhu* (those deceased to whom some debt is owed). Bone-ash urns are stored in the basement of the building. Spirit tablets marked with a strip of yellow are also accommodated temporarily during Dharma Assemblies and other merit-making activities.

Both buildings are huge atmospherically-controlled environments housing vast rows of lockers in which are stored the ash-urns of the dead and which bear a strange and uncanny resemblance to enormous apartment blocks or hotels. In *Alternate Civilities*, Weller juxtaposed temple worship as the expression of local identity and belonging with popular Buddhist groups and movements such as the Ciji Merit Association whose membership is voluntary and which bring together geographically dispersed individuals who share common beliefs, values, and sentiments in order to engage in varying forms of social action – groups and movements that, according to Weller, define 'new kinds of communities no longer based on local geography' (1999: 88). Likewise, Jordan (1999) has argued that 'high mobility makes physical place less salient' (1999: 153) noting a shift from deities of locale as nodes of religious belonging to island-wide movements and groups that draw individuals together from diverse areas through shared belief. If religious affiliation, then, is no longer determined by locality – indeed, if religious belonging, like national belonging, is a belonging in anonymity – so the shift from underground burial to the storage of bones and ashes in vast columbaria constitutes one element in general and anonymous processes of spatial redistribution and re-composition. This spatial re-ordering and consequent reformulations of belonging and fraternity reflect rural-to-urban migration and diaspora whereby community ceases to be articulated in relation to a fixed locality. For example, residents in apartment blocks in Taipei come from disparate villages, towns, and locales, and, similarly, the ash-urns stored in Taipei's columbaria reflect these new patterns of movement and settlement.

This also has consequences for the manner in which memory is encoded. Although graves are the markers of subjective and family remembering, graveyards are sites and vehicles for social memory that are, at the same time, 'maps' of local hierarchies and networks. As Taipei's graveyards disappear, giving way to the new burial sites and columbaria, memory markers are all but abolished and memory ceases to be tied to a fixed locality and itself becomes mobile, particularly with regard to portable ash-urns stored in columbaria, which can be moved around at will.

The storage of ash-urns in columbaria also necessitates the adaptation of ritual practices. During domestic worship and the annual *qing ming* or so-called 'Grave-sweeping Festival', *bai-bai* – the offerings of cooked food, incense, and spirit-money – are conventionally made to the ancestors. However, in the Zhongtaishan Columbarium offerings are rather made on a communal altar in what has become a kind of corporate ritual for the dead: regardless of surname or the circumstances of death, the dead are transformed into an undifferentiated and standardised, aggregate mass. Moreover, Zhongtaishan prepares its own offerings of incense, flowers, and such like for families to offer their ancestors, graded in terms of expense and merit to the deceased and the deceased's descendents and relatives such that the offerings themselves have taken on the character of a transaction stripped of affective content. In the local government columbarium, there are also communal altars and huge incinerators for burning spirit-money and spirit clothes, and families are encouraged to make their offerings on a communal table.

In the Philippines, internment in a Roman Catholic cemetery is the traditional manner of disposing of the dead. Usually, the cemetery is located well away from the church at the edge of the town, surrounded by a high wall and not, as a rule, frequented by relatives or friends of the deceased except on All Souls Day. Cemeteries are typically devoid of visitors and appear rather neglected places, while within their walls squatter families usually scratch a meagre living doing odd jobs such as clearing litter, cutting back weeds, and maintaining the tombs. What I found particularly intriguing, after visiting the cemeteries in Pasay in Manila, in San Pablo City, and in Los Baños, was the manner in which the layout of tombs constituted a kind of anatomy of hierarchy or a map of local status relations. In all three of these graveyards the largest tombs and mausoleums were positioned at the centre, while the coffins of the poorest were stacked, one on top of the other, at the edge, against the cemetery wall. In San Pablo the mausoleum of the Fule family was located at the centre of the cemetery, the Fule family being the largest and most powerful landowning family in the area. Radiating outwards from this centre of power the tombs grew smaller, indicating the decline in wealth and prestige of the deceased as the distance between them and the Fule tomb increased. Each of these three cemeteries, it seemed, could be viewed as a microcosmic representation of local Philippine society, a society in which status and prestige is worked out in terms of an individual's proximity to powerful families and individuals.

Cremations, ossuaries, and columbaria are not entirely new to the Philippines. Indeed, cremation has long been an option, particularly for Filipino-Chinese. The Paco cemetery in Manila was built in 1823 and has various wall niches for the dead and a chapel in the centre, though most of the niches are empty. It was originally built to accommodate victims of a cholera epidemic, while the Chinese cemetery in Manila also has wall niches and a crematorium in its grounds (Rodell 2002: 93). Outside Manila in the province of Laguna, Nagcarlan Church is famous for its crypt in which the remains of monks are buried and the wall niches outside the church in which the remains of parishioners are accommodated, though it is unclear whether the church is an ossuary and contains bone remains, or a columbarium containing ash remains. These sites are unusual in that they all offer – and have done for some time – a mode of disposal at odds with the conventional

Catholic preference for burial.⁵ Nagcarlan is also unusual because of the proximity it inscribes between the dead and the living, though I was able to find other exceptions such as St Therese Church in the grounds of UP Los Baños where a memorial garden for the accommodation of bone and ash remains is similarly attached to the church.

Nevertheless, in the last seven years there has been a mini-building boom in Manila: many of the old cemeteries are full, as are the memorial parks that emerged in the 1970s and which offered a well-maintained, clean, and secure resting place for the deceased. As such, *entrepreneurs* – typically in partnership with local parishes or missionary Orders – have begun building large columbaria for the storage of ash-urns. Some of these buildings also have their own crematoria. As such, the Columbarium of the Divine Mercy Shrine, the Sanctuary, the St Gabriel of our Lady of Sorrows Columbarium, the Santuario de San Vicente de Paul Columbarium, and the columbarium at the San Agustin seminary are all in or near metro Manila and are all examples of, on the one hand, a new kind of real estate business and, on the other, a new kind of life insurance package, with the parish or Order benefiting in terms of a percentage of the profits and/or a commitment to the construction of new Church properties. Niches are typically sold either on a ‘pre-need’ or ‘transfer of rights’ basis with sales of the latter outstripping the former. Purchase on a transfer of rights contract is essentially an investment whereby the investor buys a niche in order to sell it on at a later date, once the value of the niche has increased in value. Indeed, the promotional literature produced by these organisations resembles in many respects literature produced to sell real estate, highlighting the investment dimension and also employing phrases that might equally describe a condominium, a hotel, or even a resort, let alone a columbarium. For example, promotional literature for the ‘Sanctuary’ in Quezon City, Manila, describes it as ‘a retreat’, as an ‘investment opportunity’, as a ‘computer controlled’ environment, and as offering ‘the comforts, luxuries and security of a five star hotel.’ Even the new construction of a memorial park with facilities to accommodate ‘ash, bone and coffins’ – a partnership project between a local development consortium, Manila city Council, and Mayor Lito L. Atienza, and which is as such a local government and private business initiative – is being marketed along similar lines. Moreover, the salespeople do little to dispel stories of grave robbers and urban myths that tell of families going to the cemetery for All Souls Day only to discover that the tomb where their relative was interred had been broken into and the body removed, though for what nefarious purpose is never clear – the mythology of the *aswang* seems to have become intertwined with tales of unscrupulous doctors and devil worshippers. Most of the columbaria have parking facilities, and much of the sales pitch revolves around the ease with which families can visit to pay their respects to the deceased in contrast to the general chaos of All Souls Day characterised by choking traffic, crowded cemeteries, and noise. They also emphasise the cleanliness and orderliness of the environment in contrast to the generally lamentable state of most if not all cemeteries and the portability of the ash-urn, meaning that not only can it be

⁵ In the Catechism of the Catholic Church it is stated that ‘the Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body’ (2301). See also the Code of Canon Law and the section entitled ‘Ecclesiastical Funerals’.

removed on an *ad hoc* basis to hear Mass (something I witnessed a family do at the Columbarium at the San Agustin Seminary), but also that it can potentially be moved from columbarium to columbarium if and when the family of the deceased migrate either internally or abroad. Unlike in Taiwan, where it is the state that has primarily been responsible for providing such services, in the Philippines it is *entrepreneurs* attracted by the possibility of large profits. However, as in Taiwan, the columbarium phenomenon in the Philippines is precisely related to the increased mobility of the population or a segment thereof, where the objective tie between subjective memory and locality is in the process of being severed and which witnesses the production of places that resemble offices, hotels, and condominiums that might be found in any city in any part of the world – in other words of places stripped of the markers of local culture, and where the design values are entirely utilitarian.

The columbaria themselves usually combine outdoor garden spaces for wall niches and indoor spaces which more closely resemble the controlled environments of the columbaria in Taiwan. Indicating the location of each ash-urn is a plaque bearing the name of the deceased, their birth and death dates and sometimes a few words in memory of the departed. The plaques and ash-urns are arranged in rows and although plaques at eye-level are more expensive than those located at ground-level or above head height, nevertheless, the overall impression is of the equality of the deceased. Each plaque is the same size and carries basically the same information: death and the disposal of the dead have been standardised and simplified such that the markers of status and prestige visible in a traditional graveyard are not merely absent but have been abolished.

The question now is which people are choosing cremation and storage in a columbarium over traditional interment? The answer is quite straightforward. The companies building the columbaria and marketing these services are predominantly trying to sell to 'C' class or middle-class Filipinos. The wealthy can maintain the signs of their prestige only via traditional interment; the poor, on the other hand, tend to view cremation as a kind of 'second death' that will annul the possibility of final resurrection, so they are afraid of it and anyway would not be able to afford it. Middle-class Filipinos, however, are more mobile and can afford it: they are buying 'lots' in these new apartments for the dead so they can negate the unbelievable inconvenience of All Souls Day and express their largely unconscious desire as a class to escape the kind of status relations that traditional graveyards inscribe. Unable to resolve the contradictions of Filipino society in practice, they find solace in the resolution of status contradictions in the other world.

One further consequence of the shift from burial to cremation is that the obligation to visit the deceased on All Souls Day is broken. The deceased can now 'hear' Mass at any time, and thus the relation between the living and the dead becomes more personalised and secularised as the form and substance of reciprocity is less and less determined by a ritual calendar and more and more by the vagaries of individualised, urban lifestyles.

Conclusions

In this essay I have analysed changing geographies of disposal in the urban centres of Taipei in Taiwan and Manila in the Philippines, specifically shifts from burial to cremation, to argue that these shifts in both places reflect changing patterns of residence, fraternity, and belonging. Further, I have suggested that conventional 'functionalist' accounts of death practices in Taiwan and Manila, which assume stable relations between communities and territories and unchanging, ritualised reciprocal relations between the living and the dead, require considerable revision in order to account for the conduct of death practices at the new, urban, death-scapes. I have also hinted towards a class-status dimension whereby certain social segments appear likely to pursue traditional interment to preserve the status markers this form of disposal confers. As such, this essay does not simply reproduce the meta-narrative of the collapse of local cultures as a result of global processes of urbanisation and modernisation, but demonstrates rather the contested-ness of such processes.

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