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Rojas-Perez, Isaias. *Mourning Remains: State Atrocity, Exhumations, and Governing the Disappeared in Peru's Postwar Andes*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017.

"I have interrogated [the] formulation of death as the limit of power or as the power relationship's outside edge," anthropologist Isaias Rojas-Perez writes in *Mourning Remains: State Atrocity, Exhumations, and Governing the Disappeared in Peru's Postwar Andes* (256). With this reframing of the life-death dichotomy, Rojas-Perez's ethnographic study demonstrates how practices around mass death and public grief are political acts that can determine not only a firm narrative of a tragic past, but also the political futures of those still living. Rojas-Perez, therefore, decouples death from the primary association with ritual in order to emphasize its material grounding in medicine, hygiene, politics, bureaucracy, land, and language. Moreover, he examines what bearing human remains have on transitional justice as he situates non-living bodies as political agents in an ongoing story of trauma and political uncertainty.

Peru's internal conflict between the state and guerrilla groups, most significantly Sendero Luminoso, peaked between 1982 and 1992. The conflict brought about the deaths of at least 70,000 people, many of whom were buried in mass graves. *Mourning Remains* examines ensuing efforts by the Peruvian government to exhume, identify, and rebury some of those bodies. The book is based on two years of fieldwork among the communities of 69 Quechua-speaking people who were killed by the state in 1985 in Los Cabitos, a major site of "detention, torture, and disappearance" during the conflict (4). Rojas-Perez follows mothers of the dead and *desaparecidos* (disappeared) who observe the public exhumation and reburial process undertaken by the state and who often come

into conflict with authorities over the truth of the state's past atrocities and contemporary procedures of commemoration.

It was the Peruvian Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) that took on reburial of so-called forgotten victims of war as part of a larger effort to establish a united polity in the aftermath of the conflict (9). The state gave special attention to “bridge[ing] the gap” between Quechua speakers and Spanish speakers (i.e. indigenous and non-indigenous people), which the commission highlighted as both a major cause of the high numbers of deaths during the conflict, as well as a key obstacle to a peaceful future (30).

This forward-looking posture offers clues to the frameworks invoked by the commission to separate the Peruvian past from its future. As Rojas-Perez explains, the reburial effort was one arm of the “civilizing mission of the state” taken up by the so-called rational means of law and forensic science. Another was the very specific script employed during these reburial ceremonies that supported a state-sponsored postconflict imaginary and a “controlled recovery of the past.”

In that vein, *Mourning Remains* joins literature on state-sponsored truth commissions that emerged after several intrastate conflicts at the end of the twentieth century. While many scholars agree that the deaths of the Peruvian internal conflict came from biopolitical neglect, Rojas-Perez argues that the management of the corpses of these victims through forensic science constitutes its own kind of governmentality, distinct from both Foucault's biopolitics and Mbembe's necropower (2003). While these theorists take on states controlling who lives and who dies and how, Rojas-Perez takes on the governmentality of the dead, how it “aims at structuring the field of the *possible* action and speech of survivors, relatives, and the population so as to conduct their conduct as free subjects” (17, Fassin 2011).

Based in Andean politics and cultural practices gleaned through ethnography, as well as anthropological theory, Rojas-Perez disrupts academic distinctions between living and dead subjects. This is foregrounded by the political activism of Peruvian mothers of the dead—in this case, all Quechua-speaking women who form ANFASEP (Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Secuestrados, Detenidos y Desaparecidos del Perú).

For these activists, “the atrocity is an ongoing past,” not a prologue to a liberal future. While scholars of trauma and the state officials performing the reburial of the dead continue to locate their tragedy in an “irrational,” earlier Peru, these grieving mothers illustrate how it extends beyond statistics and language of human rights more commonly recognized within modern political frameworks. Three chapters on Andean death rituals ground Rojas-Perez's argument. These include discussion of *malamuerte*, literally “bad death.” This study of how the life cycle and subsequent mourning are obstructed in cases of *malamuerte* emphasizes how critical practices of death and dying are to political and spiritual economies of the Andes and why the generic references to “tragic death,” preferred by the state to describe the deaths are inadequate to true redress.

The book's emphasis on the political activism of mothers also illustrates how lived experience troubles assumptions of gendered responses to state terrorism, especially those that characterize women's responses to disappearances as "prepolitical" when they are often based in interpersonal grief and management of family relationships in the aftermath of death. What is neglected by many scholars of politics is how these mothers parlay familial relationships into political action—in this case, disobedience against the state and challenge to sovereign power. Their impact is perhaps best illustrated by how often and hard the state pushes back on them.

Furthermore, these practices put the rhetorical dimensions of political struggle into relief: nonhuman agency, mourning as a political sensibility, the reframing of tragedy, time, and, especially, death center bring discussions of mass violence to push beyond the limits of the living in order to understand their implications on political futures.

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