The *Ohaka* (Grave) Project: Post-secular social service delivery and resistant necropolitics in San'ya, Tokyo

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Abstract

This is an ethnography of a Buddhist, Catholic, and secular collaboration tending to the souls of marginalized men in San'ya, Tokyo's former day labor ghetto. How does this post-secular project focused on death and the afterlife reshape relationships that bond the living and the dead? How does it relate to neoliberal biopolitics of urban poverty management? This paper demonstrates how the project subverts traditional Japanese patrilineal necrosociality in ways that enhance ontological security and social ties among participants. Additionally, project developers' post-secular notion of rapprochement through acknowledging and accepting differences between communities bridged long-time rifts among faith, social service, and activist groups. While in some ways the project enables neoliberal privatization of social services, it is also a potent form of *resistant necropolitics from below* that reconfigures social relations around death to connect diverse groups, highlighting and addressing the limitations of a familial model of welfare amid neoliberal capitalism.

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Especially because we are living in a time when people who 'confront death discon-
nected, and are disconnected after death,' we want to foster a variety of social con-
nections not just during life but until after death.

It is generally understood that a grave is where one's 'remains are contained' and
something 'family and relatives maintain.' But we think we can share with society the
value of a grave as 'a place where friends and the community feel connections with the
deceased' and 'something that supports the community and friends who remember
the deceased.'

(From the crowd-funding webpage for a project entitled 'We want to create a grave
for homeless people who would otherwise become disconnected souls!')

Fujimori-san is a 57-year-old former recycler and day laborer who has spent time
living on the streets but now lives on welfare in a *doya*[1] (single room occupancy
hotel) in Tokyo's San'ya district. He walks through narrow streets toward
Sanyūkai, a free medical clinic where he received his used grey button-down
shirt, baggy black slacks, and leather dress shoes. He is led by Koike-san, a case
worker for the private, non-profit organization, who instructs him to get into a van
to go to a meeting with his psychiatrist. This is one of the supportive services that
Sanyūkai provides as part of an informal arrangement with the welfare office.
Koike-san helped him get reinstated on *seikatsu hogo* (Livelihood Protection)
benefits after being terminated for disappearing from his room and drinking up
the majority of his monthly allocation. Sanyūkai staff also had to convince the
hotel manager not to put Fujimori-san out for arguing with other residents and
vomiting in the communal kitchen after a day of heavy drinking.

We ride through the quiet back streets of working-class, east-side Tokyo to the
busier hub around Ueno Station, parking in a tiny lot amid tall buildings a few
blocks from the ward hall. As we wait in a small private clinic, Koike-san takes
advantage of this moment of sobriety to talk to Fujimori-san about his issues.
He reiterates the seriousness of a recent test of Fujimori-san's liver – it came back
almost 20 times higher than normal, a death-defying result that caused the clinic
director to refer to Fujimori-san as 'not human, a god'. Fujimori-san dodges the
subject and expresses dislike for his welfare office case worker who wants to put
him in residential treatment for alcoholism. Fujimori-san yawns, revealing a few
rotten bottom teeth, and complains that his depression medications make him
drowsy. He jokes darkly to Koike-san: 'I'll probably live another three years or
so. Will you come to my room to get me then?'

We sit down with the psychiatrist who is wearing a white mask over his mouth
and nose. He asks if Fujimori-san has been able to stop drinking since his last visit.
Fujimori-san says no. The doctor puts down some paperwork, looks Fujimori-san
in the eye and says, 'I don't mean to scare you, but if there are people you want to
see [before you die], you should see them now.' Fujimori-san chuckles awkwardly
and says, 'I understand. Don't scare me like that.' The doctor says, 'You should

quit drinking completely right now, but I don't think you can. I am going to give you a protein drink. When you feel like drinking [alcohol], drink one of these. It will fill up your stomach so at least you won't drink as much.'

We get his medications and head back to San'ya in the minivan. Fujimori-san grumbles, 'My family is in Ibaraki. I call in the morning; no one answers. I call in the evening when they should be around for dinner; no one answers. It pisses me off.' Koike-san offers to drive him to see his family, but Fujimori-san mumbles that it is pointless, and each of us is left to our own thoughts for the remainder of the ride. Although Fujimori-san's case may be extreme in terms of the extent of his drinking and related problems with housing and benefits termination, isolation from family at the end of life is not unusual among the men served by Sanyūkai. Even as Koike-san and other staff struggle to keep men like Fujimori-san housed, on benefits, and alive, often they must also prepare them for solitary death away from family.

To die alone in Japan is to face a truly grim fate. Without family to ensure that cremated remains enter a Buddhist grave and the deceased is given a Buddhist name and the proper ceremonies on anniversaries for years after death, one's soul floats as a *muen botoke* (disconnected soul). Although isolated death is increasing throughout Japanese society with greater familial dissolution and growing economic precarity (Allison, 2013), men who have severed ties with family members and live in former-*yoseba*, day labor ghettos in urban Japan that have in recent decades transformed into 'welfare colonies' (Kimura, 2010), have long faced the fate of becoming disconnected souls (Fowler, 1996; Gill, 2001).

The quotes at the beginning of this paper are from a crowd-funded project ['The *Ohaka* (Grave) Project'] created by staff of Sanyūkai, founded by Mary Knoll Catholics, along with clergy of Kōshōin, a Jōdo-shū (Pure Land) Buddhist temple, in San'ya, Tokyo's former yoseba. In creating a communal grave (Figure 1), the project aims to ensure that marginalized men, mostly former day laborers with experiences of homelessness, can have a respectable passing and do not end up disconnected in the afterlife. The Ohaka Project also intends to show Japanese society a new way of understanding graves and practices commemorating the deceased, an approach that re-conceptualizes non-familial social ties in life and after death. How does this Buddhist-Catholic-secular collaborative project focused on death and the afterlife affect relationships and experiences among the living? How does the project relate to the local system of social service delivery in which government relies on a family-centered model of welfare supported by a network of private organizations to manage homelessness?

Necrosociality, patrilineal welfare, and Japan's neighborhoods of refuge

Necrosociality refers to relationships among the living and the dead, and how they are shaped by power-laden social structures and state management of the

Figure 1. The Ohaka (grave) engraved with the characters for Sanyūkai.

population's wellbeing (Kim, 2016). In Japan, necrosociality has been genealogi-
cally based, with graves, predominantly Buddhist, encompassing and tended to by
patrilineal household (*ie*) members. Whereas actual Japanese families show more
flexibility (White, 2002) and regional variation, this ie model serves as a strong
nationalist and gendered ideological force. The head of an ie is generally the oldest

male member (unless retired from the role), and he passes this responsibility down to his oldest son to maintain the main family while other sons may form branch families. If the head has no son, the family may 'adopt' a male, who generally marries into the family. Traditional necrosocial spaces like *haka* (graves) and *butsudan* (alters), and practices like *hakamairi* (visiting a grave) and *hakamori* (maintaining a grave) link families vertically with their deceased ancestors.

Japan's definition of citizenship, corporate capitalism, conservative national identity, and familialist welfare regime are all deeply rooted in this ie system of patrilineal genealogy (Estevez-Abe, 2008; Miura, 2012). Ie are codified in the household registry (*koseki*) system, which requires that a head (usually male) and dependants be registered as a two-generation household (Chapman and Krogness, 2014). Detailed information about entry and departure from the registry including key life events such as marriage, divorce, childbirth, and death are all recorded. This registry system is a form of statecraft, a tool of social control and population management, and used as the primary identification of citizenship and thus access to various rights (Winther, 2008). The head of a nuclear family listed on a registry is legally responsible for the well-being of all household members, who share responsibility for one another if the head is not able to provide (*shinzoku fuyō*). Japan's postwar economic development model assumes family heads to be male and employed in full-time, lifelong jobs in corporations that provide generous benefits and security for their compliant labor and dedication, with women providing care for the nonworking within the household and cheap, flexible labor outside. This model has not only been seen as economically efficient, but as preserving core, conservative Japanese values. However, amid neoliberal globalization and growing precarity, this 'welfare through work and family' model is increasingly unable to provide for the wellbeing of all members and to prevent delayed marriage, increased poverty, unstable housing, and solitary death among a rapidly aging population (Allison, 2013; Schoppa, 2006). Maintaining a familial grave has become increasingly difficult, driving many to explore more convenient alternatives, or even to close them.

Despite emphasis on 'welfare without entitlement' (Vogel, 1979) and low social spending, Japan's Livelihood Protection system can be seen as providing a much more robust safety net than welfare programs in the United States. Article 25 of Japan's constitution guarantees a culturally defined minimum standard of living. But Japan's welfare system requires that family members (generally parents, siblings, and spouses) identified on the family registry be contacted and asked to provide financial support for the applicant. Many who may need benefits do not want to be a burden on family members, have strained relationships, have lost contact, or do not want their needs to be known. Thus, some forgo applying for welfare benefits and live literally on the streets. Also, despite the letter of the law, there has been a historic tendency for welfare offices to steer able-bodied men of working age away from benefits, especially if they lack a current address (Kitagawa, 2008).

Fractured family relationships, homelessness, welfare receipt, solitary death, and failed necrosociality are common in districts in urban Japan that have traditionally encompassed some of the country's most socioeconomically marginalized populations (Aoki, 1988). In the post-war era, these districts known as *yoseba* (generally translatable as 'day labor ghettos') were consolidated to provide day labor primarily to construction, shipping, and manufacturing industries (Gill, 2001). With high demand for cheap and accessible labor as Japan rapidly urbanized, men from declining rural areas and members of marginalized groups flocked and lived in pay-by-the-day flophouses. While many found ready access to daily jobs, simple housing, a micro-economy that catered to their budgets, and community (Marr 1997), many also toiled until they could no longer work and then faced homelessness and solitary death just as the economy sputtered and no longer needed them (Fowler, 1996).

The initial coordinated governmental response to an explosion of homelessness was time limited, transitional housing called self-reliance support centers (*jiritsu shien sentaa*) which emerged around the turn of the century (Marr 2015). But when they failed to reduce homelessness, legal activism widened access to welfare and a growing non-profit sector used welfare benefits to implement housing first approaches (Marr 2014). Many single room occupancy hotels in yoseba essentially converted to permanent supportive housing. In a sense, these neighborhoods shifted from being 'zones of abandonment' to 'zones of refuge' (Kim, 2016). This also brought increased participation in necrosocial practices (Shirahase, 2014). Local welfare offices and community organizations have long provided basic funerary services for people in these communities who die alone. Men living in yoseba have aged, making solitary death and afterlife a more immediate concern, and bringing more contact with social services staff who can help them avoid solitary death.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Kotobuki-cho, Yokohama, Kim (2016) showed how the material practices around the bodies of the dead in former-yoseba reshape relations among the living and the dead, namely by transforming the vertical and blood-line relations of the traditional ie model to horizontal and positional relations (with other neighborhood residents and volunteers). This highlights the creation of a new personhood different from the self-managing neoliberal self and the dutiful workers and child-bearing citizens of the post-war Japanese developmental state model. This personhood is being a member of a community of other dislocated people who care for each other, a community that extends into the afterlife. Kim acknowledges that these new practices are inseparable from the political economy of welfare in Japan but does not specify how they interrelate. In this paper, I probe into these yoseba-based necrosocial practices and, in addition to further specifying individual and community-level impacts, I extend analysis of how they relate to neoliberal restructuring of social service delivery that outsources via local networks with private, non-profit organizations, many with roots in religious faith.

Post-secular social service delivery and neoliberal biopolitics of homelessness management

Viewed as actually existing neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), Tokyo's response to homelessness is nuanced. The self-reliance support centers emphasize individual responsibility, and welfare benefit recipients who are of working age are encouraged to find work. But widespread provision of Livelihood Protection benefits and supportive services by non-profit organizations has led to a durable reduction of street homelessness, suggesting a functioning safety net. At the same time, there is concern about welfare funds being used to support substandard shelters run by 'poverty businesses' and heightened crackdowns on street homelessness, especially the construction of tents in public parks in tourist areas ramping up for the 2020 Olympics (Suzuki et al., 2018). So, Japan could be seen as facing the pressures of neoliberalism, but still retaining elements of a developmental state with an imperfect guarantee of a minimum standard of living.

In a multi-scalar analysis of efforts to address homelessness in the United Kingdom, Cloke, May, and Johnsen (2010) challenge un-nuanced descriptions of responses to homelessness as purely punitive and disciplinary in service to neoliberal goals. In particular, they point to how the involvement of faith as well as humanistic-motivated people and organizations can help religious and secular ethos of care and compassion to persist together in responses to homelessness. They describe this as evidence of post-secular 'spaces of praxis where secular and faith motivation collude in new forms of ethical citizenship' (Cloke et al., 2010: 2). This does not assume tenets of strong secularization theory such as a historical steep decline and privatization of religious belief and practice or separation of religion from institutions such as the state, market, education and social services (Casanova, 1994). Rather, these post-secular spaces reflect *rapprochement* between faith-based groups and like-minded secular actors in urban politics and social service delivery (Cloke and Beaumont, 2012). In this rapprochement, the secular and religious are intertwined and the 'naturalization' of both is problematized (Molendijk, 2015; Parmaksiz, 2018).

Spirituality and religious organizations have persisted in addressing inequalities through various stages of capitalism (Kong, 2010), but the current historical moment is significant (Williams, 2015). Global urban society has become radically plural and unequal. Government has retreated from welfare provision and turned to diverse organizations to foster social cohesion, representation, and culturally appropriate services. Thus, there is a proliferation of opportunities for rapprochement. These liminal and therapeutic spaces where religious and secular motives converge and mix encourage identification of ethical similarities. Through this rapprochement, conventional religion and secularism are deconstructed and new values, beliefs, and identities can be formed. Since in grief, beliefs and identities can be questioned and challenged, religious and secular collaborations around bereavement can be ideal opportunities for post-secular rapprochement (Madrell, 2016). Post-secular social services can resist neoliberalism not only by enacting alternative

philosophies of care that suspend deserved-versus-undeserved distinctions but also through 'prophetic radicalism', in which faith-based organizations form broad activist coalitions using ethical demands to address inequality, poverty, and environmental issues (Williams et al., 2012).

However, efforts to address homelessness by faith-based organizations can be seen as 'entanglements of faith' in which love becomes a form of disciplining biopower (Lancione, 2014). Even efforts motivated by universalistic, inclusive agape love can never be unconditional. In order to receive aid at faith-based organizations, people sometimes have to subject themselves to invasive and stressful interviews, conform to rigid programs, endure demeaning conditions, and be patient, docile, and silent. This can produce feelings of anger, frustration, fear, pain, and despair. Hennigan and Purser (2018) show how a Christian faith-based job-readiness program in the United States primarily serving men who were homeless functioned as a 'little platoon' of religious neoliberalism. The program preached unemployment as due to a lack of character requiring repentance, personal responsibility as a means to achieve forgiveness and employment, and the low wage labor market as a form of 'righteous enslavement' leading to salvation.

In a Foucaultian analysis of the neoliberal biopolitics of the 'homeless management industry' in the United States, Willse (2015) argues that its function is not only to impose discipline and self-responsibility on individual recipients of aid. Since expansion of wealth through housing depends on housing deprivation, select, racialized groups are pushed closer to homelessness and death. This is no longer simply the discipline and abandonment of biopolitics, but a more directly violent form of *necropolitics* (Mbembe, 2003), in which the state (and markets) use death of selected, marginalized groups to ensure the sovereignty and wealth of other, more privileged groups. Also, the broader system of non-profit organizations that are subcontracted by national and local governments and also privately funded is an example of how, in the neoliberal biopolitics of managing homelessness, illness and waste in the form of surplus populations are not simply abandoned but become fodder for economic investment and growth. In contrast to social welfare in the Fordist-Keynesian era which bolstered labor to serve the economy, neoliberal social programs, and the social scientific knowledge supporting them, have become a productive part of the economy. Surplus populations are not left to die, but they experience slow death by management, thus giving economic and social value to abandonment. As Willse (2015: 50) states, 'The act of dying, of being ill, gives economic life as matter to be neoliberally and biopolitically managed.'

In contrast to dichotomous portrayals, spaces of post-secular rapprochement are better seen as messy, simultaneously advancing and resisting neoliberalism in mixed ways. Bolton (2015) shows how a faith-based shelter and soup kitchen in Atlanta encompassed both structural, justice-based and individualized understandings of homelessness. These narratives were shaped by social position within and outside the organization – leaders being mostly middle class and white held the structural perspective, while those who had been homeless were poor and black and tended to blame those on the streets for their situation. This shows not only

internal organizational diversity and power dynamics, but also how both neoliberalism and resistance can be porous social phenomena.

Thus post-secular spaces and practices can be inclusive, promote a subjective sense of security and contribute to political resistance, but at the same time can reinforce neoliberal (and biopolitical) poverty management and the ideal of individual responsibility. This suggests a need to better understand how various contexts influence the capacity of post-secular social services to impact individuals and groups, as well as their potential to challenge dominant social structures. With little study of post-secular social service delivery outside of North American and Western European and Christian contexts, this study pushes for broader understanding of diverse cultural and spatial influences. In Japan, the patrilineal model of the ie and associated traditional necrosociality works as a form of necropolitics, pushing a surplus, stigmatized population toward lonely death and an ungracious afterlife as disconnected souls. So, does the Ohaka Project serve merely as a means to better manage the deaths of men in San'ya, providing economic benefit and legitimacy for social service providers? Or, in the spirit of prophetic radicalism, does it resist the necropolitics and necrosociality of the traditional ie model?

Haka (grave) ethnography

I volunteered at Sanyūkai twice per week for approximately eight hours per day over three months while the communal grave project was being planned. I interacted with staff, volunteers, and patients of the free medical clinic. While the patients reflect the tendency in the broader Japanese population to identify as Shinto and Buddhist, staff and volunteers were overrepresented by practicing Catholics, including clergy. Staff and volunteers were mostly Japanese, but foreigners were over-represented. The organization was founded by Catholic clergy and volunteers in the 1980s, but underwent an 'incomplete secularization' by becoming a private, non-profit (and thus non-religious) organization in the early 2000s. Subsequently, non-Catholic staff increased. I helped prepare food for *takidashi* (soup lines; Figure 2), and participated in the clinic's street outreach. During this period, I also participated in bi-monthly street patrols of *Hitosaji no Kai* ('The One Spoonful Group'), a group led by the vice-head priest of Kōshōin, the Buddhist temple involved in the Ohaka Project. Most volunteers in this group were practicing Buddhists, including clergy, and street patrols began, ended, and were punctuated with Buddhist prayers.

Additionally, I conducted interviews with two leaders of the Ohaka Project, one from each organization. These interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and covered the rationale, development and implementation of the project. I also interviewed nine men at Sanyūkai. All of these men have been patients of Sanyūkai, and nearly all have experienced street homelessness and live alone in residential hotels in San'ya. Most volunteer at Sanyūkai on a regular basis, helping prepare for soup lines and street outreach, as well as with upkeep of the building and basic operation of the clinic. Reflecting the categories used at Sanyūkai, I use

Figure 2. *Ojisan* and volunteers at Sanyūkai, making rice balls to take on outreach.

the term '*ojisan*' (uncle) to refer to these men. This term distinguishes between these men and other volunteers (called '*borantia*') who have not experienced homelessness. These interviews lasted around 30 minutes and focused on views of the Ohaka Project, especially decisions to enter the communal grave after death, and ties with family and others at Sanyūkai.

I also collected promotional materials of the Ohaka Project. These included the crowdfunding website which featured interviews with Sanyūkai and Kōshōin staff, volunteers, and patients, some of whom plan to enter the communal grave after death and others who worked to create it and had intentions to visit and maintain it. Also, the organizations created a pamphlet that transcribed in its entirety a 'talk event' for supporters after the grave was built.

I used NVivo software to inductively analyze data, open-coding for participant perspectives and experiences of the project, organizer objectives and perspectives

of the project, as well as evidence of influence of neoliberalism and religion. Then, I analyzed and organized codes to address the following three sets of empirical questions, derived from theoretical issues in the literature.

- Do interviewees plan to enter the grave after death? Why or why not? What do they see as the benefits of the communal grave?
- What are the motivations given for the creation of the project? What ethos of care are expressed? How are religious and secular themes evoked? How have relationships between organizations in San'ya been impacted?
- How does the project bring legitimacy and resources to the organizations? How have relationships with the local welfare office been affected by the Ohaka Project?

To bolster the validity of my data and analysis, I draw on my fieldwork experiences at Sanyūkai, on the streets, and in other organizations in San'ya intermittently over the past 20 years. I knew the vast majority of the interviewees prior to our interviews, from as short as a few weeks to as long as I have been going to San'ya. I think this promoted a high level of trust in interviews with project leaders and men living in San'ya. However, the interviews covered very personal matters such as death and relationships with family and close friends, and nearly all men had traumatic experiences including homelessness, chronic unemployment, violence and injury, separation from family, and the passing of close family members. Following my university's IRB practices, before the interview I let them know that they could skip any question and end the interview whenever they liked. While no one ended an interview prematurely, a few men were very short and vague in responding to questions about their relationships with family. I took this as indicating sensitivity and moved on. Some interviewees jokingly described the close-knit and intimate nature of their group as suffocating. Thus, I made special effort to conduct interviews one-on-one behind closed doors, and not share or discuss information learned in the interviews unless the interviewee had already acknowledged it to the broader group. These efforts did not resolve all of the complexities of doing fieldwork in such a small close community, but likely helped interviewees speak openly in interviews.

Necrosociality promoting ontological security

The nine ojisan were evenly split among those planning to enter the grave after death, those who were unsure, and those who did not plan to enter the grave. All three of the men planning to enter the grave had not been in contact with their family for over a decade and described their hopes to enter the communal grave as a commonsense alternative to their fate without the project – isolated death and becoming a disconnected soul. Kusanagi-san, a 63-year-old from Chiba who had not been in contact with family since the 1990s, said 'I don't want to die alone (*kodokushi*), so I decided to participate in the project and enter the grave to be with others [after death].' The three men who were unsure were also largely estranged

from family, but still thought a relative might come to get their remains if contacted by the welfare office. If not, they hoped to enter the communal grave as a back-up plan. Of those who had no plans, one was resolved to becoming a disconnected soul, and the other two, in their 50s, felt they were too young to think about their deaths.

While there was wide variation in plans to enter the grave, the men overall were thankful for and thought highly of the project. The broad support for the project was evident in the financial contributions to the communal grave's fundraising by ojisan, especially those who had income beyond welfare benefits from pensions or work. Many appeared on the crowd-funding site and report. Some described this participation as a form of *ongaeshi*, or paying back the organization, staff, and volunteers for the good fortune to receive their help. They also spoke about positive effects of the project on individual and group levels. Fukushima-san, a 65-year-old '*Edokko*' (born and raised in Tokyo), described the grave as providing sense of security.

> Ultimately, when you die, you don't know anything. But if we send off other people into the grave, and we know they are there, we will see that process [*nagare*, literally 'flow']. At *Obon*,[2] we visit the grave and see, not just Sanyūkai, but the Buddhist priest [from Kōshōin] praying for the dead. So, when I am dying, I think that is important I will know that I will be taken care of ... in my own heart. At the very least I won't just be tossed aside when I die. I think this gives me a sense of security [*anshin*]. I won't be lonely. People I know will be next to me, so it will be very lively [*nigiyaka*]. At least, it is better than being next to a complete stranger. And knowing that the priest is there for everyone, not just me, I think that it is good – that the grave is for everyone.

Fukushima-san's comments show how the project has enhanced relationships not only between the living and the dead, but among the living as well.

This necrosociality was bolstered by the widespread practice of hakamairi (or *omairi*), visiting a deceased person's grave. Ojisan described this practice straightforwardly as actually visiting the deceased person. Most described visiting either at Obon (as a formal group visit planned by staff of Sanyūkai) or on the anniversary of the death of a friend whose remains were in the communal grave. Nomi-san, a 58-year-old from western Tokyo, described the communal grave in the following manner:

> Sanyūkai's grave is actually easier to visit. For my family grave, I have no contact with them so I cannot go. But with Sanyūkai, there are people I know in the grave, including the guy who entered it recently, so I feel it is easier for me to make a heartfelt visit. ... I haven't talked to my family since I was on the streets and I had a lot of debt so if I got in contact they would think that I am trying to go to them for help. Also, if I visited my family grave in my hometown, I might meet someone I knew from before and I wouldn't feel comfortable.

With no barriers to visiting the communal grave, Nomi-san was able to bolster a connection with his immediate community in San'ya when distance and economic predicament prevented him from having a connection with his natal family. Also, comments by ojisan at Sanyūkai about the organization, its staff, and volunteers as *kazoku*, or family, were ubiquitous.

The Ohaka Project thus served to enhance social ties among interviewees as well as the ontological security (Giddens, 1990) of participants. Padgett (2007: 1926) defines ontological security as 'a feeling of well-being that arises from a sense of constancy in one's social and material environment which, in turn provides a secure platform for identity development and self-actualization'. Interviewees described the project as giving them a feeling of security about their future (even after death), enhancing their sense of connection with others, and identification with the community of Sanyūkai.

Post-secular rapprochement and organizational ties

The *butsudan* (commemorative alter) at Sanyūkai, donated by a Kōshōin parishioner, features a *hotoke-sama* (Buddha) standing alongside a statue of the Virgin Mary and surrounded by offerings to and pictures of deceased patients of the medical clinic (Figure 3). The altar reflects how the Ohaka Project has heightened interorganizational ties between the temple and the non-profit social service organization with Catholic roots. The priest commented on this enhancement of relations.

> We've become much closer. We had already been able to consult [with Sanyūkai] and receive advice about people that we met [on outreach], but we became closer with people who work and volunteer inside the organization, and the ojisan who sit outside. When we bring people in from outreach, we have more opportunities to follow up and keep a connection with them afterward. Not so long ago there was someone in Sumida Park who was saying that they wanted to die. He told me that he had no one to talk to, no one cared, and he was suffering so it was better that he died. I told him to have an *onigiri* (rice ball) and wait until the next day, that there was a place where he could talk to someone. The next morning, we had breakfast and then went to visit Sanyūkai. I had called them beforehand so when we got there they were all prepared. They evaluated his health. He started a new life, and now he is one of the ojisan sitting on a bench out front.

The priest sees the post-secular Ohaka Project as enhancing his group's outreach efforts by increasing the frequency and depth of interactions with Sanyūkai staff, thus strengthening the ability of its members to follow up and maintain relationships.

At a 'talk event' about the Ohaka Project, a session entitled 'What is a grave? Thinking beyond religion' was held in which the different religious and secular meanings of a grave were discussed. During the session, the director of Sanyūkai and the Kōshōin priest described their collaboration as an effort to overcome the

Figure 3. The *butsudan* (commemorative alter) at Sanyūkai.

'limits of religion'. Both described seeing religion as a form of community that brings people of similar beliefs together to work toward a shared goal. However, religion also makes clear distinctions between members and non-members, a potential source of exclusion. Their respective religions' shared concern for the afterlife and the need to feel connected with deceased loved-ones brought them

together to overcome this rift. The Buddhist priest was easily able to get permission from his congregation to allow a "secular" grave in temple graveyard. The director of Sanyūkai, who himself planned to enter the grave, said:

> As a lay missionary, I could go into a Christian grave. But, then I would be separated from my dear friends [in San'ya]. Of course, religion is useful to provide people a sense of peace (*yasuragi*). But you can still communicate with people outside of your religion. So, for the ojisan, there needs to be a generosity (*futokoro no fukasa*) that accepts everyone.

Here, the director uses a Japanese concept that invokes the Christian notion of *caritas*, providing aid without strings, showing the universalist motive of the project, as well as how it embodies the post-secular notion of rapprochement via communication inside and outside of religion.

At the talk event, the Buddhist priest described his approach to the post-secular collaborative project in the following way:

> People these days talk about '*chōshūha* (post-denomination)' and '*chōshūkyō* (post-religion)', but if you focus only on similarities [between religions] this is very difficult. The religions are different, right? So the important thing is to see the differences as normal and from those different places accept one another and create a relationship that takes care of each other. If you cannot do that, then all religions will become lonely (*sabishii*). A lonely religion has no meaning.

Thus, the priest aims to overcome the limits of religion and work with as many organizations as possible in aid efforts in San'ya, as well as in broader social activism. He said that his sect and temple in particular had traditionally been very socially active, but retreated from public work after becoming entangled in the war effort. This was changing rapidly in the wake of the 2011 triple disasters, as organizations of diverse faith, including Kōshōin, mobilized to aid in recovery.

However, the priest cited the student movements beginning in the 1960s, which used day labor ghettos as spaces of organization and radicalization, as cause of a more specific rift between the temple, the men of San'ya, and their supporters. Raised in the neighborhood in the 1980s and 1990s, he saw the social movement groups as trouble-makers and, with increases in unemployment, laborers as dirty, smelly, and less than human. It was necrosociality that bridged this rift, when he was asked by an advocacy group to perform services commemorating dead laborers at the day labor union's summer Obon festival in the mid 2000s. He began talking to men in the neighborhood and said, 'It is obvious. But I realized that they are people, just like me.' This insight is reflected in the universalist approach of his group's street patrol in which they distribute handmade rice balls and non-prescription medical supplies. Since all life is equal and precious, any rice grains spilled in preparation are piled on top of a stone statue for birds to eat. Also, the priest often tells first-time volunteers that the imperfectly shaped rice

balls (called *omusubi*, with *musubu* meaning to tie together) show that they are handmade and tie them to the men who have become disconnected from loved ones.

A board member of Sanyūkai and pro bono lawyer pointed out how the post-secular collaborative grave in San'ya could serve as a great example and inspiration to understand and overcome the limits of religion and blood relations in broader society:

> Considering that the community of Sanyūkai, with a thin religiosity, is going to commemorate ojisan, really you would first think of a public grave, or a private grave with thin religiosity. But because of the director's feelings and connection with the Buddhist priest, the grave is at a traditional temple. I think that is why it should inspire possibility in society. These days there are many more graves inside temples, and they are the most embedded in neighborhoods. So, rather than have the grave in a 'scentless' new public graveyard, having it in a very 'strong smelling' San'ya in a temple graveyard captures the unique character of this project. It is an experiment that bottles up the smell of San'ya as it is. There may be some discordance with having a non-religious grave in a graveyard sustained by a religious faith. But, by overcoming that, the project has meaning and possibility.

This comment highlights how the Ohaka Project itself is a form of post-secular rapprochement, a therapeutic space in which religious and secular differences are accepted as natural and a new ethics of tolerance and understanding of social bonds is promoted. It also describes how the neighborhood context of San'ya, especially its notorious reputation, enables and reverberates the impact of the project. As a result, the post-secular social service project enhances inter-organizational ties (Small, 2009) that make up neighborhood-based efforts to ameliorate poverty and solitary death.

Neoliberal biopolitics of solitary death

On the crowdfunding site, at the talk event, and in the pamphlet sent to donors, the project was referred to as a grave created for '*hōmuresu*' (homeless people) so that they would not become disconnected souls. However, none of the men featured in the various media were homeless at the time, and most had not been for years. Overwhelmingly the men interviewed for this paper did not object to the label despite a general stigma attached to it and having overcome the predicament. A few noted that it was not an accurate representation of their current housing situation, but thought that the use of the term in fundraising was a 'good strategy'.

The strategy produced a successful crowdfunding effort that covered costs of the grave and shared its messages with a broader public. The costs for the grave, discounted by the temple, were approximately $10,000 for the permanent right to the space, and about $5000 to actually build the grave. The remaining approximately $10,000 raised was used to cover the 17 percent charge from the

crowdfunding site (about \$4250), approximately \$1500 in annual maintenance costs, and costs involved in producing a pamphlet and small gifts of thanks, and holding the talk event for donors. Donations came from a total of 191 persons. Nine ojisan and 26 staff and volunteers appear in the pamphlet holding up signs with messages supporting the project, demonstrating commitment to share the project's messages to the general public. The talk-event pamphlet features seven newspaper articles about the project and notes that the project received 2416 likes on Facebook and 521 tweets on Twitter.

The Ohaka Project, since it involves the remains of persons on welfare and not connected with family, necessitates interactions with the local welfare and ward offices. The Buddhist priest had many inter-organizational ties with various relief organizations in San'ya and broader Tokyo, but no direct connection with the local welfare office or ward government in general. He welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with the welfare office's efforts to address homelessness in the area, and noted that his grandfather worked for the ward government while serving as head priest of the temple. But he saw the welfare office's obligation to conform to rigid laws and norms regarding blood lineage as a potential detriment to the Ohaka Project's broader goals.

> Because not everything can be taken care of by blood relations, in terms of sending away the dead, there needs to be a system that can really include people with all kinds of ties to the deceased. However, there is one problem. This is a governmental thing, but those who die alone with no one to hold a funeral, even people living in houses or condominiums, are treated the same as people who die on the street. No matter what the person wanted for their funeral, [if it has not been properly documented] the government comes and has them cremated and holds on to the remains until a blood relative gives permission about what to do with them.[3] This happened once recently with someone who planned to enter a grave here. They had money to pay for it and everything. But before we could document it, they passed away. We didn't even have time to have a funeral. So, I went with the staff from the nonprofit that helped him in his last days to the cremation. Then the remains went back to the ward office.

In regard to death and funerary practices, the priest saw the welfare office as taking too much responsibility and primarily as obstructing his efforts to promote necrosociality in San'ya. Both he and staff at Sanyūkai described multiple times trying to negotiate with welfare office workers to obtain the unclaimed remains of deceased San'ya men when they had not been able to obtain proper documentation prior to death, but to no avail.

The Sanyūkai staff person also lamented having to conform to blood lineage rules enforced by the local government, but saw the relation of the project to the welfare office as more complex given his organization's closer interactions:

> The work our consultation room does or what *Sanyūsō* [Sanyūkai's short-term shelter] does are certainly things that help the welfare office. That is an issue – how to

divide up the work [aiding the poor]. We need to think about that. But the grave,
I don't know if that is something that the welfare office should be doing. Maybe what
they are doing is putting the deceased in a [public] communal grave for disconnected
souls. That is the way they think. Because, otherwise, you would have religion
involved whether it is a Buddhist or a Christian grave, which is difficult for people
at the welfare office. Doing what they do now is all they can handle.

While he feels that there may be need for discussion of how to divide up care
responsibilities between the public welfare office and private non-profit organiza-
tions, he thinks that the detailed and spiritual demands of tending to the deceased
may be more suited for a non-public sector effort.

The Ohaka Project thus does enable the local welfare office to rely on the
private non-profit organization to deal with funerary procedures for persons on
welfare. This could be seen critically as a way to enhance the developing relation-
ship between welfare offices and NPOs who provide supportive services to address
homelessness and poverty, but are most often not directly compensated by the
state for these efforts. However, as the Ohaka Project director's comments reflect,
local government is ill-equipped to tend to spiritual needs around death, so the
project is not fundamentally a neoliberal subcontracting arrangement. Instead, the
project speaks directly to and challenges practices around unclaimed remains by
local government that rely solely on familial relationships. The project could be
seen as bringing legitimacy to the organization as a social service provider address-
ing homelessness, thus leading to further financial support via donations.
However, overall the economic productivity of the project for Tokyo's homeless
management industry seems limited since it only covered direct costs. More strik-
ing is the challenge the project presents to both Japan's traditional family-based
model of necrosociality and welfare. In addition to directly confronting the welfare
office (albeit most often unsuccessfully) for cremated remains, through print and
social media, the project delivered a message about the need for alternative models
of caring for the living and the dead in an age of heightened precarity.

Conclusion: From necrosociality to resistant necropolitics

The Ohaka Project's social productivity, empowering individuals, organizations,
and allies of a marginalized community, lays the ground for its *political produc-
tivity*. This broader political productivity is in its efforts to present to Japanese
society an alternative model of social relations (around death and life) that does
not rely on traditional patrilineal (ie) genealogy. Staff of both organizations
described how this model had failed the men who came to San'ya, and how
corporations and family are increasingly failing to serve as social safety nets in
Japan, resulting in increases in solitary death (and afterlife). They felt that they
could provide an alternative model of community based not on blood lineage
but of shared circumstances and shared experiences, extending into the afterlife.
The importance of this alternative notion of community and care has relevance

beyond necrosociality. It refuses and offers an alternative to traditional patrilineal genealogy that is the root of Japan's definition of citizenship, corporate capitalism, welfare, and gender relations. It is out of practices around death that the Ohaka Project searches for new sources of life, support, and community amid an era of heightened precarity. This could be seen as part of a broader challenge to the ie model, including efforts to legally allow married couples to use different last names or be of the same sex. Indeed, the Ohaka Project's online crowd funding effort received support and positive comments by LGBTQ groups in Japan whose members similarly face exclusion from traditional Japanese necrosociality. By challenging patrilineal genealogy, it is also calling into question the male breadwinner model that younger Japanese men are increasingly unable to attain and, as a result, experiencing a sense of failure and anomie (Cook, 2014), much like day laborers in Japan have been shown to experience failed manhood (Gill, 2012).

Despite some resonance with neoliberalist subjectivities and practices, I argue that the Ohaka Project shows potential as a form of *resistant necropolitics from below*, which I define as grassroots social practices around death that challenge dominant political and social structures of inequality. This builds on Mbembe's (2003) origination of the term necropolitics, which focuses on how state (and increasingly non-state) violence creates 'death worlds' in political, military, and infrastructural battle zones such as Gaza, Kosovo, and Africa. There, resistance is limited to martyrdom and mass suicide. Willse (2015) has argued that housing deprivation and homelessness is driven by state (in)action and pushes racialized groups closer to death, serving as form of necropolitics. In his account, this form of necropolitics and the structural conditions driving homelessness are not challenged by the management of homelessness. I highlight how the Ohaka Project served as a form of resistant necropolitics from below, an effort to challenge public understanding of relationships between the living and the dead, showing that they do not have to be based on patrilineal familialism.

The Ohaka Project as a form of resistant necropolitics goes beyond conventional sociological understandings of resilience as a group's 'ability to sustain and advance their well-being in the face of challenges to it' (Hall and LaMont, 2013: 2). The Ohaka Project provides support for Cloke and colleagues' (Cloke and Beaumont, 2012; Cloke et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2012) argument that postsecular social service is not simply incorporation of religious capital into neoliberal governance but can serve as resistance, albeit often in messy form (Bolton, 2015). The Ohaka Project targets individuals whose needs are not completely met by the state welfare system, highlighting this flaw, and thus offers a form of criticism of the state. In the Ohaka Project as well as broader supportive services, the collaboration has merged faith and humanistic motivations as a form of caritas, challenging neoliberal notions of deserving and undeserving. Lastly, the rapprochement of faith and secular ideas and practices challenges and replaces a patriarchal and familialist institution that participants see as incapable of addressing the inequalities and uncertainties of neoliberal capitalist society. This is clearly not instilling a neoliberal religious subjectivity of 'joblessness as godlessness'

(Hennigan and Purser, 2018), nor is it simply a form of 'outsourced solidarity' or a moral neoliberal citizenship that enables the amoral, free market orientation (Muehlebach, 2012).

The Ohaka Project moves beyond conventional understandings of resilience because it 'draws on and produces a critical conscience to confront and redress conditions of oppression and exploitation' (DeVerteuil, 2016: 8). A critical consciousness of mainstream understandings of patrilineal familialism is developed, this oppressive model is confronted in a public format, and an alternative model provides redress in form of enhanced quasi-familial bonds that endure into the afterlife. This is not neoliberal resilience which merely reinforces notions of self-sufficiency and responsibility, nor is it a subversive yet 'hidden transcript of resilience' that rarely confronts domination (Grove, 2013). But resistance is not always domineering and is necessarily entangled with domination (Sharp, 2000), as is exemplified in the Ohaka Project's reinforcement of mainstream stereotypes of 'homeless people' and enabling of welfare office reliance on the private sector to provide extensive and often uncompensated supportive services.

The Ohaka Project also highlights the important role of neighborhoods as enabling conditions to post-secular resistance (Cloke and Beaumont, 2012). The grounding of this collaboration in the specific neighborhood of San'ya shows how post-secular efforts are sustaining spaces of partnership, in effect 'reterritorializing the city', creating 'geographies of resistance'. San'ya, including the grave, the temple, the medical clinic, neighborhood spaces imbued with memories of the deceased, and the virtual space of the Ohaka Project crowdfunding site and imagined community of Sanyūkai supporters, serves as a 'deathscape' or a 'grief map' (Maddrell, 2016). These spatial dimensions of bereavement, in addition to shaping emotional landscapes of the bereaving, and affecting the bonds between the deceased and living, can also serve as protest and resistance, as evident in monuments to rebel leaders and memorials in front of government buildings calling for gun control.

San'ya, and other similarly situated 'neighborhoods of refuge' (*kakekomi chi'iki*) in globalizing cities, can be seen as 'service hubs' or concentrations of housing and social services addressing poverty and other forms of social disadvantage (DeVerteuil, 2016). These neighborhoods can be resistant to gentrification given property ownership by local government, religious organizations, and private non-profit organizations. My analysis of the Ohaka Project further demonstrates how these neighborhoods, given their concentration of diverse faith and secular service providers, can bolster social capital and other factors at individual and organizational levels. The Ohaka Project also provides an example of how post-secular collaborations in these spaces are politically productive and can contribute to broader resistance. While the negatives of concentrated poverty and overburdens of a density of social services should be addressed, these findings suggest support and promotion of the care, community, and resistance potential of these centralized neighborhoods. These neighborhoods of refuge could be key in protecting marginalized populations' 'right to the city' (Mitchell, 2003) in urban areas throughout the globe.

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Notes

1. A slang term that reverses the syllables of *yado* (inn), given that these simple residential hotels, with rooms generally two to three tatami mats in size (about 54 ft^2) and communal kitchens, toilets, and baths, hardly live up to the standards of mainstream inns in Japan.
2. A holiday in which people pay tribute to their ancestors, usually by visiting their familial grave.
3. In Tokyo, ward offices will generally hold cremated remains for three years. If a relative does not claim them after this time, remains will be put in a communal grave for *muen botoke* in a public cemetery.

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