I ABSTRACT I “Even” the dead are not safe? The dead in particular are dragged from catacombs to serve the living, by rituals seeking not resurrections but fixed finalized meanings, carved into stones and set into place. They can rest in peace where when and why we the living determine (as we like to think). They cannot represent themselves, and need not be represented, and yet they are, often by emphatic, chiseled memorials of sacrifice. Recalling Cohn on the congealed culture in public monuments, and Leach on highland ritual as a grammar for argument, recalling, askance, Benjamin on the power of memories of sacrifice, and reconsidering what Weber meant by “legitimate” while defining the state, we examine memorials of contested terrain. Comparing inscribed stones memorializing sacrifice and death gathers into the same field: feasts of merit of Naga, Kachin, Chin Highlanders (and Leach-Lehman-Kirsch ethnography addressing their kinship, religion and culture) English-language tombstones of Naga anti-colonial and anti-Indian heroes (and Scott’s political science of Zomia “anarchist” anti-statism), other Naga tombstones, Singapore’s many public civic and war memorials, and the Commonwealth and the Japanese memorials to war dead of World War II in the highlands and in Singapore. As argued by Weber’s student Schmitt, does the state need the dead? Or with Ohnuki-Tierney (and Edmund Burke) is it a sure sign of an ill-ordered state that it obsessively memorializes and ritually remembers its own blood sacrificed? And what are we to make of Naga love for remembering others killed by and for the self?

I ABOUT THE SPEAKER I John D. Kelly, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago and Visiting Professor of Social Science at Yale-NUS, has written extensively about semiotic technologies, violence, decolonization and postcoloniality. His books on Fiji include A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism and Countercolonial Discourse (1991) and, with Martha Kaplan, Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization (2001). On Sanskrit and state formation, most recently "Writing and the State: China, India, and General Definitions" (2006). On Anthropology and its politics, he is editor or co-editor of Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency (2010), The Ontological Turn in French Philosophical Anthropology (2014), Corporate Social Responsibility: Human Rights in the New Global Economy (in press) and Reconsidering American Power (under review). In Singapore is completing a book on self-determination in reality, with emphasis on political struggles in Highland Asia and the actual politics of the Bandung Conference.

I DATE I Wednesday, 28 January 2015
I TIME I 3.00pm to 4.30pm
I VENUE I Malay Studies Seminar Room, AS7 #04-13, Kent Ridge Campus, NUS