'It's like every other job': a consideration of forensic specialists' professional identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

The subject of forensic specialists' work with human remains in the aftermath of conflict has remained largely unexplored within the existing literature. Drawing upon anthropological fieldwork conducted from 2009–10 in three mortuary facilities overseen by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), this article analyses observations of and interviews with ICMP forensic specialists as a means of gaining insight into their experiences with the remains of people who went missing during the 1992–95 war in BiH. The article specifically focuses on how forensic specialists construct and maintain their professional identities within an emotionally charged situation. Through analysing forensic specialists' encounters with human remains, it is argued that maintaining a professional identity requires ICMP forensic specialists to navigate between emotional attachment and engagement according to each situation.

Key words: Bosnia, Herzegovina, ICMP, mortuary, forensic

The article's ethnographic study began in September 2009[1] on arrival in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), examining forensic specialists' work with human remains in three mortuaries overseen by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP).[2] This project emerged from the recognition that the subject of forensic specialists' work with human remains in the aftermath of conflict has remained largely unexplored. Within the field of psychology this literature has focused on demonstrating that body handlers do not experience long-term trauma after working with human remains.[3] Psychological studies have further examined body handlers' responses to these remains and the coping mechanisms they employ throughout their work.[4] Another significant body of literature explores medical students' encounters with anatomy lab cadavers, emphasising how this experience constitutes a rite of passage for their entry into the medical field.[5] Previous work also includes sociologist Stefan Timmermans' study of how medical examiners 'aim to bring rational, scientific order by explaining the seemingly unexplainable' to their investigations of 'suspicious deaths'.[6] In sociologist Glennys Howarth's examination of 'the undertaker's occupational role', she argues that funeral

directors 'can be interpreted as carrying out society's "dirty work" in that they release people from body-handling tasks and, by way of manipulation of mortuary symbols, deal with the practical and psychological requirements of bereaved people'.[7] Finally, in her study of archaeologists' work with human remains, Mary Leighton discusses how 'the bodies of the dead elicit a variety of responses and reactions that generate conflicting definitions of appropriate professionalism'.[8]

While providing further understanding of body handlers' encounters with human remains, this literature also possesses limitations. Most notably, when discussing body handlers' activities following disasters, it rarely considers their activities in post-conflict settings. Instead, work with human remains in 'normal', domestic settings receives primary consideration.[9] As seen, especially, in studies of medical students, a central interest in working with living individuals may influence body handlers' responses to the dead.[10] Thus, this literature does not consider that individuals who work primarily with human remains, such as the ICMP's forensic specialists, conduct themselves in a different manner. Moreover, although the use of quantitative methods of data collection and analysis in psychological literature indicates trends in body handlers' coping mechanisms and responses to remains, this method provides limited examination of why these tendencies exist. Finally, while Sarah E. Wagner has also conducted an ethnographic examination of the ICMP, she focused on the survivors who benefit from the ICMP's work rather than forensic specialists.[11]

Drawing upon anthropological fieldwork conducted from 2009–10 in three mortuary facilities overseen by the ICMP in BiH, this paper responds to this gap in the literature and analyses observations of and interviews with ICMP forensic specialists as a means of gaining insight into their experiences with the remains of people who went missing during the 1992–95 war. Namely, this article asks: how do forensic specialists construct and maintain a professional identity within an emotionally charged situation? It begins with a discussion of the research methods applied, followed by a brief history of the ICMP and an introduction to fieldwork sites and informants. The theoretical frameworks informing the analyses will then be summarised.

Although research participants reiterated that their professional identities as forensic specialists required emotional disengagement from their work, as this article considers next, various characteristics of the remains may render emotional detachment impossible. Given that emotional responses can potentially undermine detachment, informants used various techniques in order to manage their feelings. Nevertheless, further analysis points towards positive aspects of forensic specialists' emotional engagement with human remains, highlighting the seemingly contradictory nature of forensic specialists' professional identities. Accordingly, this article suggests that rather than operating on opposite ends of an emotional spectrum, forensic specialists engage in both emotional containment and expression in accordance with a specific situation.[12] Brief conclusions will follow that consider two methodological challenges of conducting research in mortuary settings and address the further relevance of this study.

Methodology

Most data was obtained through semi-structured individual interviews with, and observations of, junior osteologists, forensic anthropologists and mortuary technicians at the ICMP's three mortuary facilities in BiH: Mortuary A, located in northeastern BiH; Mortuary B, also located in northeastern BiH; and Mortuary C, located in northwestern BiH.[13] All staff members at Mortuaries B and C agreed to participate, although only one individual employed at Mortuary A elected to serve as an informant. Interviews were conducted on ICMP property and, save those with one respondent, were recorded and transcribed. Respondents were informed that information provided during interviews would be kept confidential and anonymised to the greatest extent possible, although the researcher also explained that multiple identifying features could effectively indicate their identity. Unless a translator was required, the interviews were conducted in a private setting. Some research participants, however, declined to be interviewed privately, stating that they were secure when speaking in front of their colleagues. As three staff members (Ibro, Alem and Ibrahim) spoke limited English, another ICMP employee served as the translator during these interviews; participants expressed their comfort in this arrangement. The translators were also told that all information revealed during interviews would be kept confidential.

Observing forensic specialists' work at Mortuaries B and C served as another key tool for data collection.[14] This included the recording of work conducted in the mortuary, the transfer of remains to other facilities and mortuary tours. Staff meetings were also attended, and all observations were recorded in fieldwork journals. Participant observation provided additional data. At both Mortuaries B and C, for example, staff members were joined for lunch and coffee breaks and assisted with several minor housekeeping activities. When carrying out the research, I found that my emotional responses to the human remains in the mortuary and management of these reactions echoed those experienced by ICMP employees. Reflexivity thus proved useful in analysing informants' experiences.

Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity posed some challenges. As the research agreement with the ICMP required acknowledgment of the organisation as the source of data, the ICMP itself could not be anonymised. The small number of ICMP staff members and the ease with which individuals could be identified, especially given the necessity of including biographical information about each informant, also proved problematic. Accordingly, along with cautioning research participants about the potential for their anonymity to be compromised, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to each participant in order to provide them with some anonymity. Mortuary names and locations were also anonymised. Given the possibility of respondents being identified, potentially harmful data has not been revealed.

Fieldwork dynamics and rapport with informants both enabled and restricted the recorded data. Due to my limited contact with research participants outside of the mortuary context, and because all interviews occurred within the ICMP's mortuary facilities, research participants might have felt required to present a

professional façade during their interviews and the observations of their work. Nevertheless, most research participants were seemingly candid during interviews. As noted above, the revealing nature of some interviews led to the exclusion of some data from publication. Furthermore, forensic specialists appeared to quickly grow accustomed to the presence of an observer in the mortuary and continued with their 'normal' routines. For instance, research participants occasionally 'goofed off' when their supervisor was out of the office.

The article employs qualitative methods of data analysis, combined with a review of fieldwork notes and interview transcriptions, including the identification of themes within the recorded data set. The data was then categorised in accordance with these themes. Distinguishing relationships between these themes and incorporating secondary literature where relevant enabled the development of the study's theoretical frameworks and the ability to draw conclusions from the research. Furthermore, a review of existing literature enabled the development of a tentative hypothesis regarding forensic specialists' emotional responses to human remains and their strategies for addressing these reactions. The potential for inconsistencies was sought to be minimised in the research by asking all informants similar questions during interviews and conducting observations in a comparable manner at each site. Inconsistencies in data were addressed by two methods. First, the data was continuously reviewed during fieldwork, which allowed for the presentation of these inconsistencies to research participants and to elicit further discussion of these topics. Other collected data was also utilised as a means of addressing any remaining inconsistencies.

About the ICMP

Following the 1992–95 war in BiH, during which approximately 35,000 individuals went missing,[15] President Bill Clinton pronounced the establishment of the ICMP at the G-7 Summit on 29 June 1996.[16] In describing its activities, the ICMP states that it 'endeavors to secure the co-operation of governments and other authorities in locating and identifying persons missing as a result of armed conflicts, other hostilities or violations of human rights and to assist them in doing so'.[17] The ICMP especially promotes the development and use of DNA matching technology to identify the remains of missing persons.[18] Despite facing criticism over the length of the identification process and accusations of ignoring Serb victims, the ICMP stresses its continued success.[19] It particularly highlights its identification of approximately 17,000 missing persons from all ethnicities in the former Yugoslavia.[20]

The ICMP maintains facilities throughout BiH; at the time of conducting fieldwork (2009–10) these sites included three mortuaries. Located in northeast BiH, Mortuary A identifies the remains of individuals killed during the Srebrenica genocide.[21] Also situated in northeast BiH, Mortuary B operated as the re-association centre for Srebrenica victims' remains from 2005 until its closure in early 2010.[22] Mortuary C identifies the remains of missing persons in northwestern BiH. Staff members at these three mortuaries served as the primary informants for this research project. At each facility, the forensics team usually included forensic

anthropologists, junior osteologists and mortuary technicians. These individuals' responsibilities varied in accordance with their position. As a forensic anthropologist, Katie's (35, ICMP employee since 2003) duties at Mortuary A included examining remains, receiving DNA matching reports and re-associating remains. Forensic anthropologist Sarah (42, ICMP employee since 2005) oversaw activities in Mortuary B and all anthropological examinations at the ICMP. Emir (35, ICMP employee since 2003), Kristina (26, ICMP employee since 2008), Munira (25, ICMP employee since 2008) and Anesa (36, ICMP employee since 2008) worked as the facility's junior osteologists, carrying out such tasks as photographing and analysing remains and entering information into the ICMP's database. As the facility's mortuary technician, Ibro (56, ICMP employee since 2003) oversaw the cleanliness and organisation of this mortuary. Mirna (29, ICMP employee since 2001) supervised all activities at Mortuary C. Lejla and Jasmina (both 25 and employed by the ICMP since 2009) functioned as the facility's junior osteologists; their activities echoed those of the junior osteologists at Mortuary B. Alem (52, ICMP employee since 2006) served as the mortuary technician at Mortuary C, assisting during inventories of remains and personal effects and photographing personal effects found with the remains.

Theoretical frameworks

In examining ICMP forensic specialists' experiences, this article brings into consideration the concepts of identification, feeling rules, emotion work and performance management. In psychology, identification refers to the 'cognitive process of emotional involvement by which we see other people as being like or similar to ourselves'.[23] As explored below, forensic specialists may engage in passive identification and humanisation, automatically humanising or identifying with the remains. Furthermore, forensic specialists sometimes actively dehumanise/objectify human remains in order to remain emotionally disengaged from their work.

This article also engages with Arlie Russell Hochschild's concepts of feeling rules and emotion work.[24] Hochschild notes that '[s]ocial arrangements introduce a range of feelings. They also, in various ways, control these feelings.'[25] Hochschild further argues that, '[o]ther rules are unique to particular social groups'.[26] Thus, learning and adhering to a profession's feeling rules constitutes an important part of developing and managing one's professional identity.[27] Individuals employ emotion work when adhering to feeling rules. Hochschild describes emotion work as 'the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling'.[28] She clarifies, '"Emotion work" refers more broadly to the act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing, feeling in oneself'.[29] This article focuses on cognitive emotion work, 'the attempt to change images, ideas, or thoughts in the service of changing the feelings associated with them'.[30]

Finally, Erving Goffman's concept of performance management provides insight into the ways in which research participants administer their professional identities.[31] Goffman notes, 'when an individual appears in the presence of others,

there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey'.[32] To this end, '[s]ometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain'.[33] Goffman stresses that 'each participant is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable'.[34] As argued here, ICMP forensic specialists may engage in performance management in conjunction with emotion work.[35]

Challenges to emotional detachment

While informants emphasised the necessity of containing their emotions in order to continue serving as scientific professionals, various characteristics of the remains may render this disengagement impossible. Although only Mirna spoke about publicly displaying her grief and anger, other respondents spoke of privately experiencing these emotions. First, identification with remains may elicit emotional responses.[36] Anesa noted, 'it's sometimes like when you see the age . . . and you compare with yourself or with somebody of your relatives'.[37] Kristina recalled, '[w]hen I went to . . . work for Mortuary C, I saw a baby skeleton for the first time in my life, and it was really difficult because . . . that was a mother and child and it was an unborn child still. So it . . . was difficult because I am a female, and I want to be a mother one day.'[38] For Kristina, the foetal remains further heightened the emotional impact of the case, suggesting that children's remains may be particularly stressful for forensic specialists.[39]

Shared wartime experiences also proved emotionally provocative. Mirna considered this to be one of the reasons she experienced a strong emotional response to the remains of a teenage boy: 'Maybe it's also because I was living in Bosnia all the time of the war . . . so I'm connecting . . . stressful situation from . . . the war period with . . . what happened to these people.'[40] Similarly, becoming increasingly upset, Emir spoke of identifying with seventeen-year-old teenage boys:

> I always feel too much when I am working on boys who . . . at the time of death . . . were seventeen years old, and I connect . . . my age with that genocide in Srebrenica . . . in the time . . . that war was starting, I went to Croatia at seventeen years old and I was not in Bosnia and I now make a connection with that, too. . . . I got to do everything and those young boys were in the war and killed and why did they not get a chance for life?![41]

Emir felt the skeleton on the table could have been his and seemed frustrated with his inability to understand why he was spared a similar fate. Thus, the shared nationality of the deceased individual and the forensic specialist may also result in identification and, consequently, emotional reactions to their work. As Mirna considered, 'I think that if I would go somewhere else, I wouldn't be moved as much as I'm here.'[42]

The presence or absence of trauma towards the remains may be alarming.[43] Emir noted, '[w]hen I find a skull with gunshot here in the occipital bones,[44] immediately coming in . . . my head how that man . . . feel this . . . gun here'.[45] Likewise, Lejla explained, 'one case that I worked on had a lot of injuries from . . . the gun. First, when I saw it, I said, my God . . . this man was killed brutally. Or one case . . . didn't have any injuries, you ask yourself how did he die? There's no injuries.'[46] Furthermore, the age of the deceased in conjunction with evidence of peri-mortem trauma may also prove distressing for the forensic specialist.[47] Mirna recalled: 'if I'm examining a very young guy . . . sixteen years old, who was slaughtered or . . . really unhuman way killed, then it would strike me'.[48] Mirna recounted a similar incident: 'Our estimates were he was sixteen to eighteen years [old], and I found traces that he was slaughtered on his cervical vertebrae[49] and it simply struck me because I connected myself with him, thinking how awful it has to be . . . to get slaughtered so young.'[50] Her face recalling the distress she felt, Mirna further spoke of her work on the remains of a mother and her one- and two-year-old children as extremely difficult: 'I . . . started to connect myself with moments of their killings and I felt sadness and I was crying and my complete day was ruined. You go home and you simply cannot forget . . . till you sleep over that fact.'[51] Mirna's reaction supports other forensic specialists' assertions that extreme emotional reactions to human remains can temporarily negatively impact their work, thereby requiring the forensic specialist to employ various tools and techniques in order to counteract the remains' impact and enable them to regain control over their emotions.

Management of emotional responses

Stressing the potential harm of emotional engagement with human remains, informants explained how they managed their responses. Examination of this topic thus provides further insight into the various levels of emotional containment exhibited and experienced by the ICMP's forensic specialists. Moreover, this section also speaks to the presence of feeling rules in the ICMP's mortuary facilities and the ways in which forensic specialists may engage in emotion work and/ or actively manage their performance in order to adhere to these axioms. First, respondents exhibited the use of 'cognitive and behavioral distancing (avoidance)' as a way of minimising the emotional impact of their work.[52] Alem described disconnecting his private and work life from his emotions in order to continue with his professional obligations.[53] Mirna spoke of viewing the remains as puzzle pieces because this objectification permitted her to continue with her work; use of this strategy has been recorded among other body handlers.[54] Munira noted, 'it's just you're not considering them as human beings'.[55] Jasmina described repressing emotional responses to her work, noting how she employed the same technique when taking blood samples during her previous job as a laboratory technician.[56] Likewise, shortly after commencing fieldwork, I personally commented in my notes that 'if I think about it . . . contemplating the remains and such is emotionally difficult. While I know the origin of these remains and have that in the back of my mind during the day, I try not to think too much about everything. Otherwise, I

don't think I could do this.'[57] Accordingly, when pressed to regain my own sense of professional detachment in order to continue with the research, I actively pushed aside thoughts deemed destructive to the ability to conduct fieldwork.

Without engaging in emotional detachment, informants' 'ability to perform [their] occupational role[s] would otherwise have been undermined'.[58] Mirna explained that 'from our point of view, we are every day here, every day working this job. If you connect yourself with that you would be destroyed psychologically.'[59] Sarah similarly disengaged her emotional attachment by not reading personal accounts of the atrocities in BiH:

> And I limited my reading to the facts, not the personal accounts . . . because . . . it was such an enormous burden at that time to work with these remains every day and read personal accounts in the evening and then go back to work the next morning . . . and that's where I distanced the personal aspect of the victimology . . . with the scientific approach that needed to be done.[60]

Lejla employed a similar technique: '[O]vernight . . . I think I did decide not to [be stressed] and realise[d] . . . that's . . . my job. I had to do that every day . . . eight hours a day and that . . . is the things that I come across daily . . .. And I talk to myself and explain . . . if you want to survive, you have to.'[61] Likewise, Emir explained the importance of remaining detached from the remains: 'You must forget your emotional reaction. If you do not forget, you probably crazy for two months.'[62] Placed in conjunction with previous considerations of this topic, respondents' reiteration of the importance of emotional detachment suggests that it constitutes a feeling rule among ICMP forensic specialists.[63] As in the existing literature, ICMP forensic specialists' failure to observe these rules may prevent them from carrying out their work in an efficient manner, effectively harming their professional identities. In order to avoid this negative impact, forensic specialists may utilise cognitive emotion work as a means of pushing aside their emotional responses.[64]

Furthermore, as described in previous studies, respondents also articulated the importance of accommodation in assisting their detachment from their work.[65] Lejla explained that in 'the first month . . . everything was very stressful for me because everything was the first . . . And now it's . . . really okay. Not stressed at all.'[66] Anesa explained, '[b]ut, after a while . . . it's like every other job'.[67] Emir similarly commented: 'It is coming with time. . . . Start is difficult but now, no.'[68] Likewise, Ibro and Alem both asserted that time allowed them to respond to the hardships of their job.[69] After an initial period of adjustment, therefore, respondents spoke of experiencing fewer emotional responses to the remains, thus reducing the need for emotion work. I also experienced accommodation, quickly adjusting to daily encounters with the remains as a result of learning the mortuary routines and constant exposure. Thus, while it is acceptable for neophyte forensic specialists to find their work emotionally trying, this emphasis on learning how to 'appropriately' respond to remains indicates that forensic specialists are nevertheless expected to learn how to become emotionally disengaged from their work.

Finally, this study suggests social support has an importance in allowing forensic specialists to manage their emotional responses to human remains. Social support proved personally beneficial in allowing me to cope with the emotional challenges of mortuary work. Due to the limited nature of the relationship with informants, I frequently turned to friends and family members for encouragement on especially challenging days. Nevertheless, strong rapport was established with Lejla, Jasmina and Mirna; these relationships also provided emotional support during fieldwork. Likewise, research participants stressed the importance of social support in their line of work, speaking of their relationships with co-workers in stronger terms than noted in the existing literature, categorising colleagues as 'friends' and 'family'.[70] Jasmina and Lejla especially shared a close relationship. I observed how they seemed to have developed a comedy routine: Jasmina played the jovial, outspoken, sometimes goofy partner to Lejla's soft-spoken, dry sense of humour. Similarly, during her interview, Jasmina explained that she liked the people she worked with, especially Lejla, and described the mortuary as 'a big family'. Jasmina also stated that forensic specialists could cry in Mortuary C if they needed to do so.[71] When speaking to Lejla about her colleagues, she reiterated Jasmina's opinions, categorising everyone as very friendly and noting, 'you'd never feel distrust'.[72] Thus, Jasmina and Lejla felt as though they could rely on their colleagues for support as they carried out their work. Similarly, Mirna stated, '[i]f you have a good team, we can one moment laugh and one moment we can share . . . sad feelings with each other'.[73] Mirna, therefore, indicated the importance of having colleagues to turn to for support during times of sorrow and during times of joy.[74] Thus, mortuary feeling rules allow for the expression of sadness by forensic specialists and recognise that these moments of sadness will occur both publicly and privately, further reiterating the variations in emotional containment and expression. Rules of performance management in the mortuary, therefore, do appear to permit limited displays of emotional responses to the remains.

Forensic specialists at Mortuary B similarly spoke of the importance of social support. Kristina explained how her relationship with her colleagues helped her adjust to her work: 'we had a great crew here so I didn't feel that pressure that something is bad'. Smiling, she later explained, 'we have a very great team wherever you go, really. In . . . Mortuary C it was such a great team, and here . . . I love those girls. And we are very close.'[75] While translating for Ibro, she laughed and further commented on staff members' relationship with one another: 'we're like a gang. We're like a family.'[76] This camaraderie was further evidenced during forensic specialists' interactions in the mortuary. For example, as with Lejla and Jasmina's bond, the close relationship between Anesa, Kristina and Munira was clearly evident. They joked around with one another, hugged each other, discussed various details of their personal lives and interacted socially outside of work. Laughter also abounded in the mortuary as staff members joked with and gently teased one another. Furthermore, Sarah wanted staff members to spend their breaks together to assist them in developing a strong relationship. Although not required to attend these communal meals, staff members frequently ate together and reflected positively upon this experience.

Here, Goffman's discussion of performance management can be further considered. He notes both that 'a performance is "socialized," moulded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented' and 'a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs'.[77] Accordingly, the emphasis informants placed on emotional detachment when working with human remains suggests that this response constitutes an 'official value' of the mortuary.[78] In order to uphold this value, forensic specialists may engage in emotion work so as to remain emotionally detached as they carry out their job. In doing so the forensic specialist presents him/herself as a 'professional' and strengthens what Goffman refers to as the 'team-performance'.[79] Given that 'any member of the team has the power to give the show away or to disrupt it by inappropriate conduct', all ICMP staff members must adhere to the mortuary's expectations of emotional responses.[80]

Gender variations may influence the techniques forensic specialists employ in managing their responses to human remains. However, due to the predominance of female employees in the ICMP's mortuary facilities, the collected data was inadequate to draw any solid conclusions on this topic. As both male and female research participants spoke of the importance of active emotional distancing and accommodation, these techniques may be of equal benefit to both genders. However, this research suggests that male and female forensic specialists may experience different types of camaraderie in the ICMP mortuaries. While female forensic specialists repeatedly highlighted the importance of social support, their male colleagues did not. Emir spoke briefly about his desire to establish positive relationships with his colleagues, but did not speak of social support as assisting him in carrying out his work. Furthermore, while Ibro acknowledged his use of social support, he downplayed its importance, stating, 'everything [is] on you'.[81] This difference may stem from the rules of gender performance and feeling rules within Bosnian society that prohibit men from openly displaying their emotions.[82] Consequently, male forensic specialists may not experience the benefits of having the same natural social support as their female colleagues due to these stereotypes and expectations of behaviour.

The positive side of emotional responses

Although respondents repeatedly emphasised the importance of emotional detachment in allowing them to perform their duties as forensic specialists, they also noted the necessity of maintaining an emotional connection to their work. This analysis is informed by previous studies of the connection between body handlers, the place of emotional engagement and professional identity. For example, medical students argue that experiencing emotions during the anatomy lab prepares them for their future professional identities as physicians, an occupation in which complete emotional detachment is undesirable.[83] Similarly, in discussing nurses' care of deceased patients, Hans Hadders observes, '[i]t seems as if the nurses often prefer to continue to relate to the dead patient as a person, in order to render to them what they perceive as a humane treatment of the deceased'.[84] Leighton describes

how some archaeologists believe viewing human remains as former living people allowed them to better understand the past.[85]

At the ICMP, four informants noted the positive side of emotional engagement with their work. In doing so, they not only reiterated their adherence to scientific professionalism but also their commitment to the political and/or ethical dimensions of their work.[86] For example, Emir, becoming visibly angry, voiced his disgust at hearing inaccurate information about the Srebrenica genocide in the media, noting, 'after that propaganda I always try better work my job'.[87] The seemingly 'negative' emotions of anger and frustration therefore encouraged Emir in his work with the ICMP, enabling him to feel as though his actions ameliorate the injurious effects of genocide denial in BiH. Furthermore, when discussing victims' personal effects, Sarah explained how some items,

> bring you back to the reality . . . of . . . not the scientific objectivity but the reality of the last moments of these peoples' lives. . . . And . . . I let myself feel those moments. I don't hide them away. . . . I respect myself enough to accept that that is the reality and that's why I'm here. But at the same time, I'm doing this for them. And if anything, that makes me even more comfortable with what I'm doing and why I'm doing it.[88]

In speaking of 'doing this for them', Sarah demonstrated an emotional attachment to the remains under her care. However, she did not conceive of this attachment as negative. Rather, she spoke of this emotional engagement as allowing her to maintain her professional identity as a forensic anthropologist. Jasmina also emphasised that having a human connection permitted her to 'give the maximum' when carrying out her duties. She drew on her prior experiences as a lab technician, noting how her fear of hurting someone when drawing blood made her less likely to inflict pain on them. Within the context of the mortuary, Jasmina's fear of causing emotional distress to victims' family members through making mistakes prompted her to carry out her work to the best of her abilities.[89] Mirna also spoke briefly about the importance of connecting the deceased individual to a living person. She explained that doing so, 'would make me a better person . . . and I think it's . . . important to connect', linking her professional role as a forensic specialist with her personal identity.[90]

These discussions further reiterate the beneficial aspects of respondents' emotional engagement with their work. As this type of emotional engagement is viewed as enhancing forensic specialists' performance as scientific professionals, it appears to be acceptable in accordance with mortuary feeling rules. This type of emotional engagement with the deceased also demonstrates a commitment to respecting both living and deceased individuals. Thus, complete emotional detachment can be conceived as potentially threatening a forensic specialist's professional and personal identity. Accordingly, feeling rules for the ICMP's forensic specialists also appear to require some level of emotional involvement with, rather than complete detachment from, the remains. Here, forensic specialists' intimacy with remains must also be considered. As Leighton notes, '[t]o touch another body is to initiate an intimacy', making anthropological analyses and examinations inherently intimate

actions and enabling an emotional connection between the examiner and the examinee.[91] This intimacy further suggests that complete emotional detachment may not occur as readily as informants indicated. While Leighton argues that such diverse reactions to human remains 'generate conflicting definitions of appropriate professionalism', for ICMP forensic specialists, 'appropriate professionalism' requires seemingly contradictory responses to the deceased body.[92] Nevertheless, emotional responses must still be controlled within the mortuary. Jasmina reiterated that she 'doesn't get out of control with emotions'.[93] Likewise, Lejla stated, 'I still have feelings but with a lower intensity . . . because I realised it's not good for working – you have to concentrate because you have to do it correctly', reiterating the importance of feeling rules and performance management within the ICMP's mortuaries.[94]

Conclusion

Conducting research in mortuary sites may pose two methodological challenges to the researcher. First, obtaining research permission constitutes a significant obstacle as mortuaries are frequently considered 'closed' spaces. In her study of a mortuary in an Australian hospital, for example, medical anthropologist Philomena Horsley noted the Department of Anatomical Pathology's policy that 'the observation of autopsy by any non-medical personnel, without a clear purpose for being there, is forbidden'.[95] Timmermans, for instance, was denied research access by the first medical examiner's office he approached.[96] Likewise, I endeavoured to conduct fieldwork in a UK mortuary, but the local coroner denied the request.

The emotional impact of studying death may prove problematic to the researcher.[97] Viewing human remains can especially have an impact. Although Timmermans emphasised his ability to remain emotionally detached when witnessing autopsies, he nevertheless noted that 'the variations and inconsistencies and mortal disorder remained disturbing'.[98] As I also found during fieldwork, researchers working in mortuary settings may find it necessary to navigate their emotional responses to their work. This subject has received increased attention within the existing literature.[99] For example, Gill Hubbard et al. suggest researchers rely on colleagues for support.[100] Dickson-Swift et al. likewise discuss the role of social support, self-care and 'professional supervision' in assisting researchers respond to difficult research scenarios.[101]

Despite these methodological challenges, however, conducting ethnographic research in mortuary settings can provide substantial insights into societal responses to mass death. In particular, this article has explored individual responses to human remains in the aftermath of violent conflict, analysing how forensic specialists construct and maintain their professional identities throughout their work with human remains in the ICMP's mortuary facilities. As discussed above, ICMP forensic specialists variably exhibit emotional engagement and emotional detachment throughout their work with human remains. Stressing the importance of remaining emotionally detached from their work, informants noted the roles of emotionally disengaging from their activities, accommodation and social support

in allowing them to accomplish this task. Thus, emotional detachment from their work constitutes a significant feeling rule amongst ICMP forensic specialists; engaging in cognitive emotion work enabled them to adhere to this rule.

Research participants appear to have been successful in upholding these mortuary feeling rules. Along with respondents' discussions of the prevalence of emotional detachment, the fieldwork did not directly uncover research participants expressing any distress in their encounters with remains. Instead, while in the mortuary, forensic specialists joked with or gently teased one another, sang and danced along with music playing, displaying frustration with arduous or tedious tasks and otherwise diligently attempted to complete their work. Any signs of sadness or anger occurred only when informants were asked about these emotions during interviews.[102] Nevertheless, data collected during fieldwork suggests ICMP forensic specialists *do* remain emotionally engaged with their work. For example, certain characteristics of the remains may cause forensic specialists to identify with the remains and experience feelings of sadness, anger or guilt. This study has especially highlighted the role of shared wartime experiences in impacting forensic specialists' emotional engagement with human remains, a factor not considered in previous studies. Although respondents stressed that these emotions cannot and do not occur regularly, they nevertheless openly acknowledged their existence and appeared to accept them as part of their work. While most respondents spoke about privately experiencing these emotions, public displays of such responses were also occasionally permitted, and respondents spoke of their colleagues as offering support in these instances. Furthermore, although previous studies have emphasised the negative side of body handlers experiencing emotional engagement with the remains, this study of forensic specialists at the ICMP indicates that emotional engagement with their work can, in fact, aid them in their mortuary activities and is therefore both professionally and morally desirable.[103] Consequently, mortuary feeling rules permit and even encourage some forms of emotional engagement.

While research participants stressed the 'normality' of their work, this study also provides insight into the unique nature of body handling in a post-war setting. Along with navigating their emotional responses to the remains, forensic specialists working in the aftermath of mass violence may face additional challenges. For example, although respondents downplayed the impact of politics on their daily activities, they must nevertheless conduct their work against Bosnia's challenging political climate. One employee at the ICMP headquarters noted how they must remain scientific professionals in the midst of widespread corruption in BiH.[104] Similarly, Sarah commented, 'the sharing of information between local authorities, the court system, ICMP, and so forth is not at the level of complete transparency, which results in additional, known, linked graves being unsystematically recovered'.[105] As discussed above, Emir recalled news reports minimising the number of individuals killed during the Srebrenica massacre, thereby giving greater impetus to his work. Furthermore, body handlers working in the aftermath of mass violence can be seen as needing to conduct their work with the added pressure that their actions are expected to enable post-war reconciliation and reconstruction.[106]

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Accordingly, a forensic specialists' failure to successfully manage their professional identity can be viewed as having the potential for widespread consequences.

Finally, as widely considered elsewhere in the literature, perpetrators of mass violence may engage in some form of emotion work in order to commit such acts.[107] Thus, in discussing forensic specialists' management of their professional identities in emotionally challenging contexts, this study also speaks to the strategies perpetrators may employ in carrying out mass violence. Through applying this knowledge, therefore, government leaders, policy makers and others could effectively undermine the methods utilised by the perpetrators of these acts, preventing and ceasing the occurrence of mass atrocities.[108]

Notes

1 All views expressed in this paper arising from research agreed to with the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) are the author's own and are not necessarily shared by the ICMP. The author extends her appreciation to the reviewers who read and commented on earlier drafts of this paper.

2 The term 'forensic specialist' here refers to the forensic anthropologists, junior osteologists and mortuary technicians working in the ICMP's mortuary facilities.

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4 A. Dyregrov and J. T. Mitchell, 'Work with Traumatized Children – Psychological Effects and Coping Strategies', *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 5:1 (1992), 5–17; J. E. McCarroll, R. J. Ursano, K. Wright and C. Fullerton, 'Handling Bodies After Violent Death: Strategies for Coping', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 63:2 (1993), 209–14.

5 F. W. Hafferty, *Into the Valley: Death and the Socialization of Medical Students* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 5, 11, 14–16, 53; S. Sinclair, *Making Doctors: An Institutional Apprenticeship* (Oxford, Berg, 1997), pp. 170–1, 180, 194–5.

6 S. Timmermans, *Postmortem: How Medical Examiners Explain Suspicious Deaths* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 7.

7 G. Howarth, *Last Rites: The Work of the Modern Funeral Director* (Amityville, Baywood Publishing, 1996), p. 2.

8 M. Leighton, 'Personifying Objects/Objectifying People: Handling Questions of Mortality and Materiality through the Archaeological Body', *Ethnos*, 75:1 (2010), 79–80.

9 See, for instance, Howarth, *Last Rites*; Timmermans, *Postmortem*.

10 See, for instance, Hafferty, *Into the Valley*, pp. 5, 11, 14, 53, 106–9; Sinclair, *Making Doctors*, pp. 170–1, 180, 194–5.

11 S. Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008), p. 266.

12 Thanks to the reviewer for suggesting this theoretical framework.

13 See Table 1 for descriptions of research participants.

14 Observations could not be conducted at Mortuary A due to space restrictions and employees declining to participate in the study.

15 Z. Ljubas, 'Bosnia Unveils Complete List of Missing Persons', Balkan Insight, 4 February 2011. URL: http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnia-s-central-records-on-missing-persons-introduced (accessed 24 November 2013).

16 W. J. Clinton, 'Statement on the International Commission on Missing Persons in the Former Yugoslavia', *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton, Volume I: 997–998*, 29 June 1996. URL: http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1996-book1/pdf/PPP-1996-book1-doc-pg997.pdf, 997-998 (accessed 8 July 2012); See also Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies*, pp. 96–7.

17 ICMP, 'Mandate'. URL: http://www.ic-mp.org/mandate/ (accessed 26 May 2014). The ICMP previously operated as an intergovernmental organisation. See ICMP, 'Headquarters Agreement between The International Commission on Missing Persons and The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina', 26 April 1998. URL: http://www.ic-mp.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/headquarters-agreement-between-icmp-and-the-council-of-ministers-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina.htm (accessed 23 November 2013); On 15 December 2014, however, '[t]he Foreign Ministers of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Belgium, and Luxembourg signed a Framework Agreement . . . that grants a new legal status to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) (ICMP, 'ICMP Established as International Organization in its Own Right', 15 December 2014. URL: http://www.ic-mp.org/news/icmp-established-as-international-organization-in-its-own-right/ (accessed 22 July 2015).

18 Wagner discusses how identifying missing persons through science was considered an 'appropriate' method of promoting societal reconstruction in BiH. See Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies*, p. 89; thus, the ICMP can be viewed as presenting itself as an apolitical organisation while also promoting a political agenda. See J. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 256.

19 The author met with representatives from various organisations and family members of missing persons who described frustrations with the length of the identification process. See also Balkan Insight, 'Identification of Palic Raises Questions', 6 August 2009. URL: http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/identification-of-palic-raises-questions (accessed 24 May 2014); and K. Juhl, 'The Problem of Ethnic Politics and Trust: The Missing Persons Institute of Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 4:2 (2009), 239–70.

20 ICMP, 'About ICMP', URL: http://www.ic-mp.org/about-icmp/ (accessed 26 May 2014); for details of the ICMP's identification process, see ICMP, 'Locating and Identifying Missing Persons: A Guide for Families in Bosnia and Herzegovina'. URL: http://www.ic-mp.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/locating-and-identifying-missing-persons-a-guide-for-families-in-bih.pdf (accessed 15 January 2012); Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies*, pp. 111–16.

21 J. W. Honig and N. Both, *Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime* (New York, Penguin Books, 1996); D. Rohde, *Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica: Europe's Worst Massacre Since World War II* (New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997).

22 'Re-association' is the process by which forensic specialists re-assemble the body of a single individual from commingled remains.

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24 A. R. Hochschild, 'The Sociology of Feeling and Emotion: Selected Possibilities', in M. Millman and R. M. Kanter (eds) *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life* (New York, Octagon Books, 1976), pp. 280–307; A. R. Hochschild., 'Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure', *American Journal of Sociology*, 85:3 (1979), 551–75.

25 Hochschild, 'The Sociology of Feeling', 288–9.

26 Hochschild, 'Emotion Work', 566.

27 A. Hochschild., *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012), pp. 23–4, 118, 152, 154; Leighton, 'Personifying Objects'.

28 Hochschild, 'Emotion Work', 561.

29 *Ibid.*; see also Hafferty, *Into the Valley*, p. 16.

30 Hochschild, 'Emotion Work', 562.

31 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1959).

32 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

35 Hochschild, 'Emotion Work', 555–60.

36 Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 87–94; Timmermans, *Postmortem*, p. 278.

37 Interview, 12 November 2009; Dyregrov and Mitchell, 'Work with Traumatized Children', 14; McCarroll *et al.*, 'Handling Bodies', 212.

38 Interview, 12 November 2009.

39 A. Dyregrov, J. Kristoffersen and R. Gjestad., 'Voluntary and Professional Disaster-Workers: Similarities and Differences in Reactions', *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 9:3 (1996), 541–55, 552; Dyregrov and Mitchell, 'Work with Traumatized Children', 12–13.

40 Interview, 8 April 2010.

41 Interview, 12 November 2009.

42 Interview, 8 April 2010.

43 McCarroll *et al.*, 'Handling Bodies', 211; Ursano and McCarroll, 'The Nature', 397.

44 The occipital bone constitutes the back of a person's skull. See S. N. Byers, *Introduction to Forensic Anthropology: A Textbook* (Boston, Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 32–3.

45 Interview, 12 November 2009.

46 Interview, 6 April 2010.

47 See also C. Koff, *The Bone Woman*: *A Forensic Anthropologist's Search for Truth*

in the Mass Graves of Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo (New York, Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005), pp. 153, 233, 251; McCarroll *et al.*, 'Handling Bodies', 211.

48 Interview, 8 April 2010.

49 These bones 'comprise the top seven bones of the spinal column'. See Byers, *Introduction to Forensic Anthropology*, p. 40.

50 Interview, 8 April 2010.

51 *Ibid.*

52 McCarroll *et al.*, 'Handling Bodies', 214; see also Ursano and McCarroll, 'The Nature', 397; Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 90–1.

53 Interview, 8 April 2010.

54 *Ibid.*; Dyregrov and Mitchell, 'Work With Traumatized Children', 8; M. Pelletier-Hibbert, 'Coping Strategies Used by Nurses to Deal With the Care of Organ Donors and Their Families', *Heart and Lung*, 27:4 (1998), 230–7, 233; Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 92–4.

55 Howarth, *Last Rites*, p. 73.

56 Interview, 6 April 2010; Dyregrov *et al.*, 'Voluntary and Professional Disaster-Workers', 552.

57 Fieldwork notes, 6 November 2009.

58 Howarth, *Last Rites*, p. 78.

59 Interview, 8 April 2010.

60 Interview, 9 November 2009; see also Koff, *The Bone Woman*, pp. 31–2; Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 92.

61 Interview, 6 April 2010; Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 90–3, 94.

62 Interview, 27 April 2010.

63 See, for example, Hafferty, *Into the Valley*, pp. 14–16, 126–8, 140–3; J. W. Lella and D. Pawluch, 'Medical Students and the Cadaver in Social and Cultural Context', in M. Lock and D. Gordon (eds), *Biomedicine Examined* (Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Press, 1988), p. 133; Sinclair, *Making Doctors*, pp. 194–5.

64 Hochschild, 'Emotion Work', 562.

65 R. C. Fox, 'The Autopsy: Its Place in the Attitude-Learning of Second Year Medical Students', in D. Mechanic (ed.), *Essays in Medical Sociology: Journeys into the Field* (New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1979), pp. 52, 58–62, 76; B. Raphael, L. Meldrum and B. O'Toole, 'Rescuers' Psychological Responses to Disasters', *British Medical Journal*, 303 (1991), 1346; Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 79.

66 Interview, 6 April 2010.

67 Interview, 12 November 2009.

68 Interview, 12 November 2009.

69 Interview with Ibro, 13 November 2009; Interview with Alem, 8 April 2010.

70 See Alexander and Wells, 'Reactions of Police', 547, 552; Pelletier-Hibbert, 'Coping Strategies Used by Nurses', 234.

71 Interview, 6 April 2010.

72 Interview, 6 April 2010.

73 Interview, 4 May 2010.

74 Alexander and Wells, 'Reactions of Police', 547, 552; Dyregrov and Mitchell, 'Work with Traumatized Children', 8. See also Koff, *The Bone Woman*, pp. 104, 209 and 253 for discussion and social support.

75 Interview, 12 November 2009.

76 Interview, 13 November 2009.

77 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, p. 35.

78 *Ibid*., p. 35.

79 *Ibid*., p. 82.

80 *Ibid*.

81 Interview, 13 November 2009.

82 S. Jansen, 'Misplaced Masculinities: Status Loss and the Location of Gendered Subjectivities Amongst "Non-transnational" Bosnian Refugees', *Anthropological Theory*, 8:2 (2008), 181–200; A. Simić, 'Management of Male Image in Yugoslavia', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 42:2 (1969), 89–101.

83 Fox, 'The Autopsy', 52, 56, 68; Hafferty, *Into the Valley*, pp. 107–9.

84 H. Hadders, 'Dealing with the Dead Patient at the Intensive Care Unit', *Mortality*, 12:3 (2007), 207–22, 212.

85 Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 96–9.

86 Thanks to the reviewer for bringing this point into consideration.

87 Interview, 12 November 2009.

88 Interview, 9 November 2009.

89 Interview, 6 April 2010.

90 Interview, 8 April 2010.

91 Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 80.

92 *Ibid*., 79–80.

93 Interview, 6 April 2010.

94 Interview, 6 April 2010. See also Leighton, 'Personifying Objects', 79.

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101 V. Dickson-Swift, E. L. James, S. Kippen and P. Liamputtong, 'Doing Sensitive Research: What Challenges Do Qualitative Researchers Face?', *Qualitative Research*, 7 (2007), 344–7.

102 See also V. Crapanzano, 'Preliminary Notes on the Glossing of Emotions', Kroeber Anthropological Papers Nos. 69–70, 1989. URL: http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/anthpubs/ucb/text/kas069_070-007.pdf (accessed 7 November 2014).

103 For example see Timmermans, *Postmortem*, p. 278; Ursano and McCarroll, 'The Nature', 398.
104 Conversation on 25 November 2009.
105 Interview, 9 November 2009.
106 ICMP, 'Fact Sheet'. URL: http://www.ic-mp.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/icmp-fact-sheet-english.pdf (accessed 6 July 2011). See also Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies*.
107 For example see C. R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, HarperPerennial, 1998); J. Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (trans. L. Coverdale) (New York, Picador, 2006).
108 Many thanks to Dr Samuel A. Hardy for his assistance in developing this argument.

Table 1: Profiles of Research Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Duration of employment with ICMP	Position	Place of Employment
Katie	35	F	North American	BS, Biology; BA, Anthropology; MSc, Forensic Science;	Employed for three months in 2002; Employed full-time since 2003	Forensic anthropologist	Mortuary A
Sarah	42	F	North American	Diploma in journalism; undergraduate degree, anthropology; postgraduate degree, physical anthropology; near completing a doctorate in anthropology	Employed since 2005	Head of Mortuary B; oversaw anthropological examinations for all mortuaries	Mortuary B; Mortuary A from January 2010
Emir	35	M	Bosnian	Completed four years of medical school[a]	Employed since 2003	Junior osteologist	Mortuary B; Mortuary A from January 2010
Anesa	36	F	Bosnian	Completed four years of medical school; began medical university; working towards undergraduate degree in Health Care/Science	Employed since 2008	Junior osteologist	Mortuary B; Mortuary A from January 2010
Munira	25	F	Bosnian	Completing undergraduate degree in biology	Employed since 2008	Junior osteologist	Mortuary B; Mortuary A from January 2010
Kristina	26	F	Bosnian	Undergraduate degree in biology	Employed since 2008	Junior osteologist	Mortuary B; six months at Mortuary C; Mortuary A from January 2010
Ibro	56	M	Bosnian	Completed secondary school programme in construction	Employed since 2003	Mortuary technician	Mortuary B; Mortuary A from January 2010
Mirna	29	F	Bosnian	Completed three years of medical school; MSc in forensic anthropology	Employed since 2001	Forensic anthropologist; Mortuary C supervisor	Began in blood collection unit in 2001; Mortuary C since 2006
Lejla	25	F	Bosnian	Undergraduate degree in biology; completing postgraduate degree in biology	Employed since 2009	Junior osteologist	Mortuary C
Jasmina	25	F	Bosnian	Completed medical school, trained as laboratory technician	Employed since 2009	Junior osteologist	Mortuary C
Alem	52	M	Bosnian	Completed secondary school, qualified driver	Mortuary C since 2000; employed by ICMP since 2006	Mortuary technician	Mortuary C

a In BiH, the term 'medical school' (*medicinska skola*) refers to a specialised secondary school. Graduates are considered medical technicians (nurses) and may continue to study health sciences at the university level. Thanks to Dr Marko Stojić for the clarification.