

Heather Conway, *The Law and the Dead* (Routledge, London, 2016, 298 pp., £110 hardback).

In this enormously ambitious volume, Heather Conway seeks to create the first comprehensive resource for those studying the legal regimes that govern recently dead bodies in England and Wales. As Conway notes, this is a complicated task, since there exists no comprehensive legal framework laying out recorded core principles that govern these post-mortem issues. As a result, she draws upon an impressively diverse array of sources – including statutory law, common law traditions in Britain and elsewhere, ecclesiastical law and European human rights law – to create a timely resource for scholars, lawyers and policy makers working on post-mortem issues in Britain.

The book's chapters can be divided into two narrative arcs. The first five chapters deal with the laws governing the disposal of human remains. Chapter 1 covers the varying legal codes that may be triggered by the death of a person, from registration of the fact of death with local authorities to civil and criminal investigations. Chapter 2 focuses on the laws governing the disposal of the dead, focusing primarily on burial and cremation. Chapter 3 examines the laws governing pre-funeral possession of the corpse and responsibility for its associated expenses. Possible conflicts over the burial are covered in the fourth chapter. This section concludes in chapter 5 with a focus on funerary instructions. Unlike the other chapters, Conway here goes beyond documenting the scant legal regime governing the execution of the dead's wishes to convincingly advocate for the establishment of a framework in which people's pre-mortem funeral instructions acquire legal authority.

The second section of the book shifts attention away from the funeral itself towards other kinds of issues associated with the recently dead. These include questions of organ donation (chapter 6), exhumations (chapter 7) and memorialisation of the dead (chapter 8). A brief conclusion calls for England and Wales to move beyond the current ad hoc regimes governing the disposal of human remains to establish a statutory framework capable of addressing the growing variety of post-mortem practices.

Conway ties together these myriad topics through a number of recurring themes. First and foremost is the radically under-defined nature of statutory law regarding

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the post-mortem fate of the individual. As Conway demonstrates, statutory law concerning the disposal and management of the recently deceased is radically underdefined. As a result, laws governing the disposal of remains, funeral arrangements and memorialisation are primarily derived from common law, which was mostly developed in response to Christian burial practices.

Across the chapters, Conway highlights two broad areas in which this common law regime is insufficient for governing modern mourning practices. First, recent decades have seen a proliferation of new technologies for disposing of the dead that are not sufficiently addressed under existing case law. New modes of disposing of dead bodies – such as resomation (a process of liquefying the corpse), promession (freeze-drying human remains) and environmentally friendly burial practices – exist in an area that is ill-defined by current legal principles. While Conway helpfully places these practices into the context of public health, sanitation and safety regimes, the possibility that they may violate common law understandings of public decency has yet to be tested. Even for cremation, where the law is relatively well defined, there are no laws specifically dealing with the transfer or disposal of ashes.

Second, Conway helpfully and repeatedly highlights the insufficiency of common law to address increasing diversity within England and Wales. For instance, rules for determining the right of possession – and thus, who may legally determine the manner in which the deceased's remains shall be dealt with – follow the same common succession law rankings used to determine property rights to the deceased's possessions. These succession rights, however, fail to represent the array of kinship practices existing in modern Britain today. As a result of the law's reliance on an antiquated definition of kinship, close loved ones from queer families, divorced or estranged relatives and non-Western kinship patterns may face difficulties in asserting their rights to bury their loved ones. When case law in England and Wales is under-defined, Conway helpfully draws upon the legal traditions of other common law jurisdictions, especially the United States, Australia and New Zealand, both to clarify the legal issues entailed in this diverse range of funerary customs as well as to suggest legislative remedies that are urgently needed. Although these comparative examples drawn from Anglo settler-states are helpful in illustrating some of the complications surrounding non-Christian burial practices, the text might have benefited from broadening this comparative angle to include the ways post-colonial common law systems have managed indigenous customary rites. The well-known anthropological study surrounding disputes between kin and clan over the burial of Kenyan lawyer S. M. Otiendo Kikuyu, for instance, might have helped to illustrate some of the issues that an increasingly multicultural Britain is likely to have to reckon with in the coming decades.<sup>1</sup>

These complications in common-law practice are exacerbated by the existence of complex and overlapping systems of law for governing post-mortem practices. Once again, Conway deftly navigates these overlapping yet under-defined domains of law: within England, laws governing burial sites are split between secular cemeteries governed by common law and church graveyards that fall under ecclesiastical law. This may particularly complicate cases of exhumation, where ecclesiastical courts have ruled in inconsistent ways. In addition, Conway repeatedly highlights new issues

raised by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), particularly Article 8, establishing the right to a private and family life, and Article 9, establishing freedom of religion. Although the book was written prior to the Brexit referendum, the likely adaptation of at least some of these ECHR principles into domestic British law makes these sections of the book a valuable resource for understanding future litigation around death disputes.

With the burgeoning field of death studies and increasing concerns with the ways governments seek to regulate death, *The Law and the Dead* represents a timely contribution. Conway's erudition and attention to detail have produced an impressive resource for anyone seeking to understand the legal terrain governing the disposal of human remains. Although the full implications of this ill-defined area of legal practice will have to be more fully developed by future researchers, Conway has produced an important resource for anthropologists, sociologists, historians, political theorists and other social scientists working at the intersection of politics, legal studies and death studies.

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### Note

- 1 D. W. Cohen and E. S. A. Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (Heinemann, London, 1992).

Derek Congram (ed.), *Missing Persons: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Disappeared* (Toronto, Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2016, 368 pp., \$69.95 paperback).

The disappearance of people is marked by different cases such as armed conflict, dictatorial regimes, structural violence, among others. It is a social problem of immense complexity and can be analysed in a multidisciplinary way. Many scientific approaches have shown a sensitivity to the question of disappearance and the volume *Missing Persons, Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Disappeared*, edited by Derek Congram, evidences it. This edited collection contains work from disciplines such as anthropology, history, law, social psychology, forensic science, among others.

The different discussions that take place show how disappearance occurs in different ways and in different contexts; that is, how the conjunctural aspect is important when it comes to understanding the different cases of disappearances described in this volume. Alex Maass addresses the disappearance of Aboriginal people in schooling processes. The author makes a distinction between the Truth Commissions of Canada and the truth commissions of other contexts, in which situations of missing have occurred in a dictatorial context rather than in a postcolonial one (chapter 1). This differentiation in turn leads to a distinction in the search for the missing and the resolution of disputes surrounding the disappearances. Alex Maass raises the need for the emptiness left by disappearances to impregnate the memory of Aboriginal people.

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But although the contexts of different cases make each disappearance something singular, there are aspects that traverse between them. In the work of those who search for the dead and seek accountability for the disappearances, the role played by the remains is central. The location of the remains – not only corporeal but also personal objects like clothing – enables the identification of the victim, re-establishes the link between body and name and reconstructs the identity of the disappeared, as is shown by Sarah Wagner and Rifat Kesetovic in their analysis of forensic work in Potocari cemetery (chapter 2) and by the discussion of Ariana Fernández Muñoz and Derek Congram (chapter 13). In the process of identification the missing person's relatives, 'the leftovers' of the disappearance, become important. Blood collection and DNA testing are complex tasks that would be even more complex without the work of missing persons' relatives.

Another debate opened by this volume is the centrality of space in the search of missing persons. The space of disappearance is a technical issue to be addressed in the work of those who search for the disappeared. It allows them to reconstruct the story and the understanding of the disappearance and to relate it to the disappeared and the disappearing agent. As Samantha Lundrigan writes, space is invested by the aggressor's rationality for committing crimes (chapter 9) and, as Derek Congram, Arthur Green and Hugh Tuller point out, space is constituted as a way of verifying witness accounts and the possibility of finding more mass graves (chapter 10).

Likewise, the disappearance of persons involves the individual and collective traumas of the relatives and communities of the missing persons. The disappearance entails the psychosocial pain of a non-natural death that is intensified by the ambiguity of the disappearance (chapter 12) and demands a complex psychological work (chapter 8) even at administrative, welfare, legal and economic levels to manage the family situation (chapter 3). Also, as Pinzón notes, the disappearance disorganises and destabilises the biographical trajectories of the missing person's relatives. It also breaks the logics of ritualisation of death; forcing the invention of community strategies to manage the link with people whose whereabouts are unknown (chapter 5).

Disappearance, like the general debate of this volume, mobilises different actors around it. Scientists, affected relatives, state agents, activists, non-governmental organisations all circulate and transit through spaces of disappearance in an effort that pertains to a collective obligation (chapter 7) and a politicisation at the international level sustained by a humanitarian morality (chapter 4) that is sensitive to the misfortune and vulnerability of human beings.

The present volume delves in a very eloquent and perspicacious way into difficulties and technical innovations that accompany the search for missing persons. It highlights the catastrophe generated by the breaking of the meaning of social life, inherent to disappearances,<sup>1</sup> and the importance of ensuring the accountability of the 'unaccountable'.<sup>2</sup> This debate that problematises the absent proposes new methodologies of search and contributes to the knowledge of people who are placed beyond life and death.

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## Notes

- 1 G. Gatti, *El detenido-desaparecido. Narrativas posibles para una catástrofe de la identidad* (Montevideo, Trilce, 2008).
- 2 J. Edkinds, 'Missing Migrants and the Politics of Naming: Names without Bodies, Bodies without Names', *Social Research*, 83:2 (2016), 359–89.

Jay D. Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead? The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2016, 336 pp., \$29.95 paperback).

In the morning of 11 September 2001 New Yorkers witnessed the most spectacular attacks in their history. Two planes took off from Boston for Los Angeles; a third plane took off from Newark, New Jersey, bound for San Francisco; a fourth plane left from Washington, DC, again bound for Los Angeles. All of them took off between 7:15 and 8:05 a.m. Some minutes later all the televisions screens in the world showed the planes flying into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in the south of Manhattan, and the city of New York in flames. In New York, 2,752 people lost their lives in the World Trade Center and 148 died on board the flights from Boston. Reduced to ash and dust, human remains were scattered over the site of Ground Zero. The most difficult task was – and still is – to identify the body fragments of the victims.

Jay D. Aronson, in asking the question *Who Owns the Dead*, is expressing not only the difficulties that American authorities have faced in identifying the remains of the victims of 9/11, but also all the controversies related to these difficulties. Obviously, as in any situation of missing bodies or uncovered mass graves, in this case the remains of the bodies of the victims – heroes in spite of themselves – generated a burst of national unity. On 11 September 2001 the place where the twin towers once stood became a battlefield, as we were reminded by President Obama, in his speech in August 2008, by his explicit reference to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in order to underscore the importance of the event and the sanctification of the place, just as the Gettysburg battlefield was sanctified as a national cemetery. Thus the importance of a memorial like that of the 'unknown' soldier who makes the nation. As the author reminds us 'human remains have political, cultural and emotional power' (p. 9).

The book tells in detail how the families, individually and collectively, organised in voluntary associations that represent all the diversity of the victims, all the causes behind their identification, and have struggled to give a place and status to death and for the memorial – architecture, exposition, presentation of the names without bodies, and recognition of the sacredness of the place. As is emphasised in the book, 'the presence of so many stakeholders, so many agendas, meant that the World Trade Center became a new kind of battleground: an economic, legal and moral one over who could claim ownership of the site.' They were all a matter of controversy and struggle with local, public and private authorities for 'equality in life and equality in death.'

Chapter after chapter, Jay Aronson analyses, scrupulously and rigorously, every moment from the first research to identify the dead to the construction of the

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memorial. An exhaustive search based on public and private reports, media coverage, websites, speeches, as well as in-depth interviews with families active in the voluntary associations, and with local authorities, takes the reader from the very day of the attacks to the construction of the memorial. Chapters follow a chronological order, starting on that Tuesday morning, 11 September 2001, remembering the mobilisation of the New York Police Department and the Fire Department of New York, the family activism involved in efforts to recover the remains. The next step – and chapter – reminds us that the debris of the twin towers was transferred to Fresh Kills. The author looks in detail at family associations (such as Families for a Proper Burial) and the negotiations with the mayor of New York to ensure ‘respect for death’. Obviously, the experience of 11 September has induced forensic experts to develop new procedures and new tools for the identification of human remains. Whenever new identifications were made, the remains were returned to the families to which they had been matched. Families are regularly informed of advances in DNA research and efforts to honour their wishes. The importance of collaboration with family associations and with the office of the chief medical examiner in the process are researched and presented in detail.

The controversies are not over. The author shows that the plan for a memorial immediately pitted families against local authorities, private interests against public interests and, at the level of development, an economic vision against a historic vision. The question of repository, the museum as a cemetery, or its symbolic value, all the debates and controversies, show that ‘there were serious problems with the way the National September 11 memorial and Museum was engaging with victims’ families and that it needed to alter its consultation practices’ and its approach to the question of ‘who counted as relevant family stakeholder’ (p. 237). The author answers the question by asserting that ‘the dead belonged first and foremost to the powerful’ (p. 253).

The sociologist Robin Wagner-Pacifici has called attention to the exemplary nature of 11 September, underlining the dual aspect of the event, at once limited in time and shifting, qualifying it as ‘restless’.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the controversies that accompanied each stage of construction were part of this ‘restlessness’, as they brought in tow a variety of interpretations, opinions and decisions by cultural and political actors concerned with choosing the most honourable way of showing respect for the victims. For the victims’ families, the most important issue was public recognition, with a sepulchre situated in a place for visits, remembrance and commemoration.

This book is very rich in information. Every controversy is described and reported in great detail. All aspects of the debates and controversies are expressed in the actors’ own words or from the press, giving weight to the book. However, it raises an important question, difficult to answer in this context where family grieving, national history, family and national responsibility and a duty of remembrance and commemoration all come into play and require all this information. Many issues are at stake that are crystallised mainly around the memorial, repository and museum: respect for the families, the privacy of their mourning, and at the same time giving a message to the world.

The date 11 September 2001 is clearly a turning point in world history, an event that marked the start of the 21st century. Its effects are obvious not only in the transformation of space – the towers are gone from the horizon at the southern tip of Manhattan — but also in movements to etch it onto the national memory. The goal is to enshrine the event in the local space and ensure its global representation. The event also had the effect of rethinking perceptions of America in the world as a global power which gave rise to worldwide grief. ‘We are all Americans’, *Le Monde* headlined the day after the attacks – a formula that was picked up by many other media outlets.

The scale of national mourning notwithstanding, burial is a personal and family affair, no matter what the circumstances of death were. The French historian Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau profiles three women who lost their husbands or children in the course of conflict. He describes their determination to recover the bodies from military cemeteries and ‘bring them back home’ to bury them close by.<sup>2</sup> But with the attacks of 9/11, where the question of identification is the most important issue for families, the handling of victims’ remains is perceived as a global issue, even if solutions must be sought at the local and national level. A national museum, a war cemetery grounded in sanctified American soil, has been erected in American history and the history of humanity.

In this context of globalisation performed by terrorists of Al-Qaeda, where families and the nation and the world are all attacked, where there is a dispute and controversy with no satisfactory solution, Jay Aronson, leaves the reader, who now has all the detailed controversies, to decide ‘who owns the dead’ of 9/11? The question generates legal, political, civic and ethical interpretations of what has become a ‘global’ question.

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## Notes

- 1 R. Wagner-Pacifici, ‘Theorizing the Restlessness of Events’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 115:5 (2010), 1351–86.
- 2 S. Audoin-Rouzeau, ‘Corps perdus, corps retrouvés. Trois exemples de deuils de guerre’, *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 5:1 (2010), 47–71.

Garibian, Sévane (ed.), *La muerte del verdugo. Reflexiones interdisciplinarias sobre el cadáver de los criminales de masa* (Buenos Aires, Miño y Dávila, 2016, 268 pp., paperback).

*La muerte del verdugo* (The Perpetrator’s Death)<sup>1</sup> is a captivating edited volume in the Spanish language presenting twelve essays that reflect on the death of perpetrators of mass violence and the fate of their remains. The contributions meet at the intersection between three fields of enquiry: genocide and mass atrocities studies, transitional justice and the now upcoming field of perpetrator studies. Within this intersection, there has been a paucity of studies on the death of perpetrators, which makes the volume timely and original.



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Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the volume yields towards the perspective of transitional justice. With that, the essays focus more on the moment and form of death, rather than on the fate of the perpetrators' human remains. As such, the introductory chapter by Sévane Garibian delineates three modes of death: *escape-death*, symbol of impunity (Pol Pot, Bokassa, Idi Amín Dada, Franco, Pinochet, Milosevic); *sentenced-death* or public atonement (Nazi perpetrators, Saddam Hussein); and *revenge-death* or extra-judiciary execution (Talaat Pashá, Mussolini, Bin Laden, Gadafi). The introduction is followed by Elodie Tranchez' Prologue, which explores the co-existence of tyrannicide and international law. In each contribution in this volume, the particular death of a dictator-perpetrator is studied in the light of processes of transitional justice. And, as the diverse cases outlined in this book show, the three modes of death do not determine a particular judicial and social afterlife.

The afterlife and agency of the dead bodies as performed through processes of memory and memorialisation remain in the analytical sidelines of the volume. Nonetheless, the book does make a case for thinking of forms of transitional justice in relation to the *post-mortem* treatment of the perpetrator and memory politics. Throughout the entire collection of essays, the authors point out the difficulties that exist when it comes to the social and cultural demythification of each perpetrator and his legacy. Who can speak for the dead? To whom does their memory belong? How to undo certain memory narratives?

On the one hand, rumours and conspiracy appear to be a common thread in the afterlives of several perpetrators. Anne Yvonne Guillou describes how the circumstances of the death and cremation of Pol Pot are still not completely known and rumours of suicide and poisoning continue to circulate. Florence Hartmann details how the controversies surrounding Milosevic's death, being possibly an assassination rather than suicide, allowed him to attain the status of martyr in the eyes of many of his followers. At the same time, several groups nourish rumours on the real final destiny of his remains. Nicolas Patin illustrates the complete obliteration of the bodies of Nazi perpetrators condemned at Nuremberg and argues that while public execution might turn perpetrators into martyrs, the complete disappearance of their remains actually provides fertile ground for virtualisation, myths and rumours. Didier Musiedlak describes the successive stages of forensic investigation to answer persisting questions in relation to the exact moment of death and execution of Mussolini. Muriel Montagat underlines the enduring controversies on the exact circumstances of Gadafi's execution in Libya.

On the other hand, several essays underline the construction of nostalgic myths about the perpetrator. Former Khmer Rouge fighters are discretely preserving Pol Pot's tomb. Milosevic's grave is the object of a yearly pilgrimage of a small group of nostalgics. Karine Ramondy underscores the continuity of myths surrounding Idi Amin and Bokassa, which – particularly in the case of the latter – identify the leader as a founding hero. Rosa Ana Alija Fernández shows that even the private character of Pinochet's tomb – in contrast to Pinochet's dream to be buried in a grandiose mausoleum similar to Franco – could not completely eliminate public claims for memorialisation. Ana Arzoumanian underscores the opposition between



Saddam Hussein's public exhibition in a private building, which is a cross between a museum and a place of pilgrimage, and his death sentence by the Iraqi court. Similarly, Mehmet Talaat, in Sévane Garibian's essay, continues to be a national hero, despite his conviction *in absentia* and the not guilty verdict of his assassin-victim.

In most of the cases presented in this volume, the state is not directly involved in an active (counter-)memorialisation of the perpetrator. On the contrary, in almost all cases, the perpetrators' graves (when not hidden or absent) become sites of memory, while their deaths give way to rumours and myths. The questions arising from this thought-provoking volume relate to the symbolic order surrounding the perpetrators' death and remains and, as such, could benefit from insights gleaned from memory studies. How can transitional justice deal with the (de)construction of myths in the aftermath of violence?

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## Note

- 1 This volume has also been published in French as *La mort du bourreau. Réflexions interdisciplinaires sur le cadavre des criminels de masse* (Paris, Editions Pétra, 2016).

Sévane Garibian, Élisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (eds), *Restos humanos e identificación. Violencia de masa, genocidio y el 'giro forense'* (Buenos Aires, Miño y Dávila, 2017, 224 pp., paperback).

Sévane Garibian, Élisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus have edited an interesting volume on the impact of forensic sciences on post-conflict societies' efforts to come to terms with a violent past. It makes a welcome contribution to the literature that has been mushrooming over the past decade or so.<sup>1</sup> The booming interest can be partly attributed to the global diffusion of the forensic epistemic community. New and powerful forensic groups such as the EAAF (Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team), ICMP (International Commission for Missing Persons), Physicians for Human Rights and ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) are working in more than forty countries around the world. The application of forensic tools has extended to new thematic areas, including the identification of migrants and refugees who die in precarious border crossings in the US and in the Mediterranean.

There are several reasons to praise this book. First, its scope is interdisciplinary, with contributions from historians, forensic anthropologists and legal scholars. That said, the inclusion of a list of contributors along with short biographies would have helped readers to appreciate the disciplinary breadth. Second, the book is written in Spanish. This is particularly important, as some of the most prominent forensic groups and experts are based in Latin America. Hence, the book will reach a specific yet crucial audience that is usually side-lined from these debates. Most importantly, it maintains a fine balance between well-documented cases (former Yugoslavia, post-Holocaust Poland, Rwanda) and some exciting, under-explored ones (victims of Stalinist purges, exhumations in Malaysia).

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In addition, some well-documented cases are presented from a novel perspective. A case in point is Nicky Rousseau's fascinating chapter on the victims of Apartheid in South Africa. Global attention seems reserved for the South African TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), with relatively limited attention paid to those who went missing during repression and the central role of the Missing Persons Task Team in unearthing those victims. Rousseau uses this specific case to explore how official transitional justice mechanisms or political parties can shape the definition of victimhood.

Frances Tay's well-written chapter sheds light on the untold story of the exhumations of victims of Japan's occupation (1941–45) of Malaysia. As the majority of the victims were members of the minority of Chinese Indonesians, the chapter highlights the challenges for minority groups to put their own suffering into national histories. Similarly, Tony Platt offers a very personal account of the destruction and looting of graves of Native Americans in California. His chapter emphasises the technical opportunities offered by the new (forensic) instruments, while noting the duty of the research community to be socially responsible.

Other chapters include ethical issues stemming from the application of forensic tools in post-conflict societies (Fowler and Thompson; Wastell and Jugo), the unique experience of Polish Jewish survivors who dignified their loved ones with unofficial burials (Finder), the memory of Stalinist purges and prolonged silences (Mazz and Tckii) and the use of exhumations to promote a particular version of the past in Bosnia (Wastell and Jugo) and Rwanda (Korman).

As I see it, the book has two overlapping limitations. First, in the introduction, the editors maintain that one of the book's strengths is its comparative approach. Yet all the chapters explore a single case, and the overall comparability of the cases is not justified or clarified at any point. A concluding chapter wherein the editors synthesise the insights in a comparative way would have immensely benefited the quality of the book. This raises a second, corresponding limitation. While the book does a good job in describing the interesting experiences of a number of different countries, there is no clear overall question or theme linking chapters. A concluding chapter pinpointing the lessons learned would have made the key ideas crisper and more accessible.

Overall, this is a timely contribution to the growing effort of the academic community to fully appreciate the role of forensic tools in post-conflict societies.

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### Note

- 1 See, for example, D. Congram *Missing Persons: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Disappeared* (Canadian Scholars' Press, 2016); F. Ferrándiz and A. Robben, *Necropolitics. Mass Graves and Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); A. Rosenblatt, *Last Rights: Forensic Science, Human Rights, and the Politics of Mass Graves* (California: Stanford

University Press, 2015); S. Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing* (Oakland, CA, University of California Press, 2008).

Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Élisabeth Anstett (eds), *Human Remains in Society: Curation and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Genocide and Mass-violence* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017, 254 pp., £80 hardback)

In this book the editors have compiled the different contexts in which human remains acquire centrality within the society in which they emerge. The importance that human remains have acquired lies in the significant changes brought about by the regulation that is starting to be elaborated around human remains. In other words, although the remains have always been present in society, in the past they did not mobilise the agents and sensitivities that they mobilise now.

The authors emphasise the incidence of twentieth-century events in terms of the production of death on a large scale and the status that the bodies acquire in that process.

As part of the series 'Corpses of Mass Violence and Genocide', this book addresses methodological questions about the treatment of bodies that are shaped by violence, where the phases of destruction, search and identification and return to society must be seen together. The book presents a variety of situations exemplified by cases from different parts of the world at different periods of the twentieth century, all of which prompt the questions about the body as a trace and the necropolis mobilised around it.

We are told of remains that are often sacralised, in an exercise of 'radical objectification' (p. 48), which, in the case of bones, leads to the concept of 'agency' that is becoming a source of interest in the social sciences.

From necropolitics, recognition and identification of the remains to socially installed forensics, from Kenya to Poland, from post-Holocaust to the Rwandan genocide, this work brings together a diversity of disciplines (archaeologists, historians, social scientists) to explore the impact of these traces on the society that remains.

In the aftermath of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, the bones, when present, are embedded in cultural practices without regard for archaeological or biological treatment. This is the central issue of the first chapter, in which we see how these remains have an active life in society, and which begins precisely with the problematisation of these remains. The second chapter takes us to Europe, to the repoliticisation of death in the Polish post-Holocaust context, with a focus on the human remains of the Belzec extermination camp. A different context and a different time, as compared to the first chapter – but the same concern is generated by the remains once they are introduced into the social debate.

The third chapter focusses on the period 1930–70, after the Habsburg empire, when bodies in an advanced state of decomposition were used as war propaganda, even decades later forcing political confrontations, and with strong religious implications.

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Chapter 4 addresses responses to the exhumations and reburials that took place in the post-World War II era, which resituated human remains at the centre of society by forcing confrontation with those remains. The treatment of bodies in post-genocide Rwanda, between identification and memorialisation, reveals the interaction between bodies and the living subject, and also between the challenge of anonymity and the impossibility of identification, as is seen in chapter 5.

‘Corpses of Atonement’ is addressed in chapter 6, which explores the discovery and commemoration of eleven victims of Nazi terror. They are therefore resignified bodies, which mobilise tension around the presence of death and which are instrumental in the construction of memory.

Chapter 7 focuses on both forensic and archaeological techniques for locating the remains of the victims of the Holocaust, addressing the methodological challenges, as well as the religious implications and sensitivities mobilised around the concentration camps. Chapter 8 returns to the African continent to discuss the struggle for recognition of the victims of the genocide in Namibia, the exercise of repatriation of bones from Germany, as well as the symbolism and social implications that it generates in society.

Chapter 9 addresses the emotional immateriality of human remains, focussing on the extermination of a people in Newfoundland, addressing the political life of dead bodies in the public sphere.

Each contribution shows the relevance of human remains in a society and how they generate mobilisation around their materiality. In conclusion, this work presents concrete cases that allow us to approach different scenarios that pose the debate about human remains in society, showing us how the materiality of the remains generates actions that endow facts of the past with meaning in the present.

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