

Review of *Restos Humanos e Identificación: Violencia de Masa, Genocidio y el “Giro Forense” (Human Remains and Identification: Mass Violence, Genocide, and the “Forensic Turn”)*

REFERENCE Garibian S, Anstett E, Dreyfus J-M. *Restos Humanos e Identificación: Violencia de Masa, Genocidio y el “Giro Forense.”* Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila; 2017, 224 pp.

Georgina Pacheco, MSc^a

The book *Restos Humanos e Identificación: Violencia de Masa, Genocidio y el “Giro Forense,”* edited by Garibian, Anstett, and Dreyfus, aims at showing the social impact of the practices and methodologies that were used for the exhumation and later investigation of the dead from ten different mass violence incidents. The inspiration for this book comes from the Second Annual Conference of the “Corpses of Mass Violence and Genocide” research program, held in Manchester, England, in 2013, which constituted one part of a three-phase study. This volume deals with the second phase: the treatment of corpses and human remains after the disaster and their later discovery and identification. This is a review of the Spanish translation published in 2017. *Human Remains and Identification* was originally published in English by the Manchester University Press in 2015.

As the main objective, the studies that the editors chose deal with the fate of the bodies of civilian victims resulting from mass violence and genocides during the 20th and 21st centuries, with a comparative and exploratory purpose. Throughout the book, two main themes are evident: search and identification. Further, the editors describe a “forensic turn”: the introduction of forensic expertise into the process in the form of pathologists and anthropologists. These experts enter into the vast scene of mass violence and genocides with the power of modern technologies such as geolocation and DNA identification, and they have become crucial agents for the legitimacy of the discovery and identification of the dead, as well as providing an additional body of research on this topic.

The editors of the book have diverse backgrounds. Sévane Garibian is professor of law in the Universities of Geneva and Neuchâtel (Switzerland) and director of the University of Geneva’s research program “Right to Truth, Truth(s) through Rights: Mass Crimes Impunity and Transitional Justice.” Élisabeth Anstett has been a researcher in social anthropology at the National Centre for Scientific Research in Paris since October 2009 and is a member of the Interdisciplinary Research Institute on Social Issues. Her area of expertise covers Europe and the post-socialist world, on which she has published extensively. Jean-Marc Dreyfus is reader in Holocaust studies in the department of history at the University of Manchester. His research interests focus on Holocaust and genocide studies, the anthropology of genocide, and rebuilding postwar societies. All three editors’ backgrounds make them ideally suited to work with and synthesize studies on this topic.

The editors have used 10 cases from around the world, described by 10 different authors, to address this topic. The book’s ten chapters are divided into three sections according to the specific fate of the dead and the variety of techniques and technologies used for their location and identification.

In their introduction, the editors discuss the different contexts and the way each case has been managed, and the description of the main objectives of the book as a whole. The first part, which includes four chapters, has as its main theme the agents who searched for and identified the bodies. Chapter 1 describes the fate of the graves of Native Americans in California during the 20th century and warns about the need to be sensitive to the use of unequal power between investigator and subject. Chapter 2 examines the efforts of Polish Jewish survivors of the Holocaust to give a dignified

^aJudicial Bureau of Investigation—Legal Medicine, Heredia, Costa Rica

burial to members of their family and community in the immediate postwar period. Chapter 3 focuses on the victims of the Stalinist purges and the silence of the Soviet and Ukrainian authorities involved in one major mass grave. Chapter 4 examines the forced disappearances in Uruguay and Latin America.

The three chapters in part 2 examine the means and methods employed in the search for the dead. Chapter 5 focuses on the Stalinist repression in Soviet territory, and chapter 6 examines the use of new techniques for identification (i.e., DNA identifications), the relevance of the traditional techniques (i.e., osteometric), and the complexity involved in analyzing a mass grave. The forensic and political lives of secondary mass graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the subject of chapter 7.

Part 3 focuses on the stakes arising from the exhumations. Chapter 8 describes and analyzes the sociopolitical issues of the search for the bodies of the African National Congress militants murdered by the police of the apartheid regime. Chapter 9 includes an analysis of the history of exhumations done in Rwanda. The book finishes with the exhumations ordered in Malaysia by the British military courts due to the trials for Japanese atrocities committed during their occupation of the peninsula.

The authors attempt to answer different questions related to the emergence of the “forensic turn,” although not all of the contexts are related to it, mainly because of different motives and interests of the exhumations. All of the contributors describe the role of the state (and, in some cases, include a political view), the victims, the multiple factors involved in the exhumations (geography and topography of the murder sites, practices, and techniques), and the identification and return of the remains to their families (or a second inhumation, with a commemorative purpose). Chapter 6 is the first one that describes this technological approach and more

scientific procedures. Chapter 7 shows how the multiplicity of practices employed during the exhumation and identification of victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina might themselves have disrupted the process while helping to reconstruct Bosnian society as a whole. Chapter 8 discusses the fact that, in certain contexts, families do not want to be a part of the exhumation process.

The volume’s strengths lie in parts 2 and 3, where the three approaches—agents, territory, and state—are commingled and the studies detach from a triumphalist narrative. Readers will find themselves immersed in the conflicts and the way they were handled, either in a positive or negative manner. The ethical position assumed by each author gives a personal and intimate perspective of the cases.

A picture of the murder sites in each chapter seems necessary for illustrative purposes. Chapter 3 lacks specific numbers of victims or exhumations and therefore leaves a blank in the total understanding of the murders. Some chapters refer to a “transitional justice,” but none of them clarify the term, though it seems more of a political term than a scientific one.

In summary, the vision for this volume is positive. It gives arguments and reflections about the emergence of modern technologies in the identification of the dead, ethical perspectives in dealing with commingled human remains in mass graves, and how families cope with the exhumations. It differs from similar volumes in that the authors reflect on the motives and interests of those who performed the exhumations. This book leaves the reader with a general idea of international mass violence contexts and repercussions. This book is recommended for forensic scientists interested in mass violence and genocides, as well as lawyers, historians, and others who wish to understand more about the complexity of the scientific work of the exhumations and the identification of human remains.