

□ Repressed Bodies as a Research Topic: Archaeology, Memory and Political Uses

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The search for, study and management of repressed bodies from contemporary conflicts has been a significant part of the archaeological agenda in recent years. Amongst forensic disciplines, archaeology has gained growing social recognition as a relevant procedure and research methodology, as well as being a tool for defending human rights. The scientific process and the specific nature of materiality have given archaeological intervention an air of objectivity which has at times led to forensic interest being favoured over historical interpretation.

Repression carried out on bodies in different historical situations has shaped a variety of archaeological contexts, each with its own particularities and problematics – bodies in mass graves, combatants' bodies left behind on the battlefield, disappeared bodies, absent bodies and bodies that were disposed of. Repression carried out on bodies affects how the archaeological record is studied, but it also affects discourses, social processes for dealing with trauma and the actions of memorial and political agents.

The role of archaeology in the exhumation of repressed bodies and the search for the missing raises many questions. International law has not been universally adopted; in some countries, the deaths of people whose remains are exhumed are seen as facts of history, whereas in others they are considered crimes against humanity. The “forensic turn” has led to the scientification of social, cultural and political processes, displacing

important emotional and symbolic considerations in favour of the collection of objective data and genetic identification. In this vein, “forensic archaeology” has also taken on a relevant role, prioritising the collection of detailed data in view of prospective legal actions. The consideration of the body as an archaeological artefact itself, an important material for the construction of a broader understanding of violence as a social relation, seems to have been partially discarded. What actions can be possibly considered after exhumations? How can social, cultural, emotional, legal and historical complexity be fully addressed? What role has archaeology played in the past, what role does it currently play and what role should it play? Must archaeology make final decisions in light of inadequate laws? Is it possible to be objective but not impartial?

This issue brings together relevant ideas and projects that include archaeological and multidisciplinary analysis of the social discourses and political uses surrounding repressed bodies in a variety of contexts. In the first article, Márcia Hattori shows how the bureaucratic and legal process involved in declaring a person dead does not mean that the person's identity is maintained or that that person is given an identity. She reads autopsy reports on people killed in São Paulo (Brazil) in the 1970s against the grain to expose state mechanisms that make people – specific categories of people – disappear. Carlos Marín and Bruno Rosignoli present a comparative study of the role of forensic archaeology in Argentina and Uruguay and its relation to judicial investigations. They show the breadth and multiplicity of materialities related to the wide range of crimes against humanity committed in these countries. Laura Muñoz-Encinar explores killings and clandestine burials in unmarked graves during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) through the multidisciplinary study of exhumations from a historical, archaeological and forensic anthropological perspective. Eulàlia Díaz-Ramonedá, Lourdes Herrasti and Queralt Solé examine violent repression during the Spanish Civil War through a gender perspective, discussing differences that have been detected through archaeological investigation in how men and women were killed and buried. Laia Gallego-Vila and Queralt Solé look at the relocation of the bodies of people killed during the Spanish Civil War to the Valle de los Caídos (Valley of the Fallen), a large mausoleum established by the Franco dictatorship in 1959. They reflect on what it means that thousands human remains, now transformed into archaeological evidence, remain buried within the walls of this monument. In the final article, José Farrujía de la Rosa discusses the public exhibition of the bones and embalmed bodies of indigenous Canarians in the museums of the Canary Islands. He examines the archaeological materialities and historical elements that have been used in manifold ways – even to create works of art – in the context of the ethical and cultural debate about the proper treatment of these human remains.

Repressed bodies, whose existence is often revealed by archaeology, are the central theme in this issue – bodies that can take on many dimensions and remain present and powerful even after having disappeared.