

(2012)

RESEARCHED REMAINS: THE POST-MORTEM LIVES OF BODIES IN HUMAN RIGHTS  
INVESTIGATIONS AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

M. Elle Saine

**Abstract**

This thesis explores ethical considerations for the use of genocide and massacre victims' remains for anthropological research during human rights investigations in post-conflict societies. This research is situated within a theoretical framework which investigates the relationship between the body and science, beginning with a historical discussion of the rights of the body and following the evolution of discourses on the ethical use of remains through the 1990 NAGPRA legislation. Focus then turns to the dual roles of the post-mortem body as subject and object in human rights investigations, exploring how this position changes as different actors engage in the exhumation, identification, and reburial processes, and how matters of individual and collective identity influence perceptions of human remains. Finally, this thesis investigates the genocidal conflicts in Guatemala and the former Yugoslavia, and the research conducted on remains during anthropological investigations, with the purpose of enhancing the current discourses on ethics in physical anthropology and international human rights investigations. Data was collected from twenty-one articles from the *Journal of Forensic Science* and *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* in order to assess the detail with which the conflicts were described, consent defined in the acknowledgements for the use of the remains for research and publication, and the proposed end goal of the research including its perceived impact on survivors and identifications. While a majority of the articles discussed the conflicts to some degree, a minority mentioned "genocide" or "human rights abuses", and even fewer discussed the individual conflicts in detail. In cases where permission was noted for the use of human remains for research, permission was always given by overseeing organizations. None of the articles mentioned seeking family or survivor consent for the use of remains or antemortem data for research. Finally, this review found that a majority of studies were initiated to create population-based standards for constructing the biological profile in order to advance identifications. The aim of this thesis is not to critique previous research conducted on human remains or to make any judgments as to whether said research is ethical, but rather to engage in current discourses on ethics in anthropology and human rights investigations.