



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### **Unearthing, untangling and re-articulating genocide corpses in Rwanda**

**Citation for published version:**

Major, L 2015, 'Unearthing, untangling and re-articulating genocide corpses in Rwanda' *Critical African Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 164-181. DOI: 10.1080/21681392.2015.1028206

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1080/21681392.2015.1028206](https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2015.1028206)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Critical African Studies

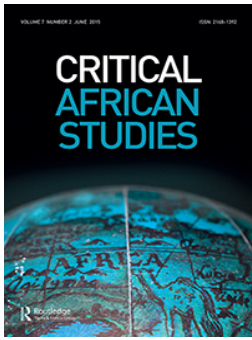
**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.





## Unearthing, untangling and re-articulating genocide corpses in Rwanda

Laura Major

To cite this article: Laura Major (2015) Unearthing, untangling and re-articulating genocide corpses in Rwanda, *Critical African Studies*, 7:2, 164-181, DOI: [10.1080/21681392.2015.1028206](https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2015.1028206)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2015.1028206>



© 2015 The Author(s). Published by Taylor & Francis.



Published online: 30 Jul 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 237



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

## **Unearthing, untangling and re-articulating genocide corpses in Rwanda Déterrer, démêler et réarticuler les corps du génocide au Rwanda**

Laura Major\*

*Department of Social Anthropology, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK*

*(Received 3 November 2014; accepted 28 February 2015)*

This paper is concerned with the mass graves and exhumed bodies of victims of the Rwanda genocide and war of the 1990s. A government-led programme of exhumation of mass burials and individual graves has taken place over the last decade. The exhumation of mass graves has been undertaken, in the main, by Tutsi genocide survivors who work under the supervision of state officials. Post-unearthing, these bodies are unravelled, and the remnants of soft flesh, clothing, personal possessions and bones are separated from each other. Skeletal structures are fully disarticulated and the bones pooled into a vast collective, for placement within memorials. The outcome of these exhumations is that remains almost always lack individual identity at the point of reintering. A productive analytical comparison is found in examining exhumations of Spanish Civil War graves, where the fates of individual dead are closely entangled with the lives of survivors. Here there is a clear contrast with exhumations in Rwanda, in the possible re-articulation of identities with specific human remains. But a similarity is also critical: in both cases the properties of human remains, as unsettling materials, garner specific ‘affects’, which drive forward national political projects that aim to consolidate particular collective memories of conflict, albeit that this kind of ‘material agency’ is mobilized to very different ends in each case.

**Keywords:** exhumation; genocide; human remains; memorials; post-conflict; Rwanda

Le présent article porte sur les charniers et les corps exhumés des victimes du génocide et de la guerre des années 1990 au Rwanda. Au cours de la dernière décennie, le gouvernement a mené un programme d'exhumation des fosses communes et des tombes individuelles de victimes. Des exhumations de charniers ont été entreprises, pour l'essentiel, par des survivants tutsis du génocide travaillant sous la supervision d'agents de l'État. Après déterrement, le corps est démêlé ; les restes de tissus mous, vêtements, effets personnels et os sont séparés les uns des autres. Les structures squelettiques sont entièrement désarticulées et les os regroupés en grands amas pour être placés dans des mémoriaux. En conséquence, à l'issue de ces exhumations, les restes sont presque toujours dépourvus d'identité individuelle au moment d'être redéposés. L'examen des exhumations de tombes de la guerre civile espagnole offre une comparaison analytique fructueuse: le sort de l'individu décédé est étroitement lié à la vie des survivants, et un contraste est manifeste étant donné la possible réarticulation de l'identité pour chaque cas. Une similitude est également cruciale: dans les deux cas, les caractéristiques des restes humains comme matériaux troublants recueillant un «affect» particulier font avancer des projets politiques nationaux qui visent à consolider la mémoire collective des conflits, mais c'est une agencéité mobilisée à des fins très différentes.

**Mots-clés:** exhumation; génocide; restes humains; mémoriaux; après-conflit; Rwanda

---

\*Email: [l.major@ed.ac.uk](mailto:l.major@ed.ac.uk)

## Introduction

Sophia holds the skull upside-down, swirling the water around inside, and then flipping the head right-side up to shake the water and debris out of the base, through the hole where the spine would meet the cranium. Turning the face towards me she pokes her finger through the bullet hole at the center of the forehead. We contemplate the side of the skull where the fragile bone at the temple has gone leaving a jagged hole. Perhaps the bullet had not been enough? Or did this breakage happen during decay? The bone cannot endure the pressure from her hands; the head crumbles and slips from her grasp, bumping roughly onto the grass. The other workers look-up from their tasks as Sophia hisses with frustration. Tutting to herself, she tries to slot the pieces back together, a fruitless task as there is nothing with which to glue the fragments. Eventually she passes the skull to her left, to the person charged with the second rinsing. The remnants are slopped into a bucket along with the piles of ribs, bone fragments, and teeth. Sophia laughs, sitting down to slosh water around the bucket: thick washing-powder suds threaten to overspill the rim; carcasses of beetles are suspended in bubbles at the surface. Still chuckling, she nods her head towards the team of exhumers and the pile of corpses in transformation around us. 'This' she says, 'is Genocide'. (Edited from field notes, Kigali, 19 June 2011)

Frequent episodes of mass violent unrest, including war and genocide, have taken place within the recent history of Rwanda. There are many graves that derive from these conflicts. This paper is concerned with the mass graves and exhumed bodies of victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and the associated war, which consumed the country throughout the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> A government-led programme of exhumation of mass and individual burials of presumed Tutsi victims of genocide has taken place across Rwanda over the last decade. These exhumations are undertaken under the presumption that there are between 800,000 and a million bodies of Tutsi genocide victims buried within Rwanda. Many lie in mass graves, some have been interred in family plots and a large number are assumed to be concealed in shallow burial.

The mass grave exhumations focused on here unearth both the remains of dead with established identities and, more often, those with identities unknown. Exhumation is carried out by teams largely composed of people who identify themselves as 'survivors of the genocide' (I have called this group 'survivor-exhumers'). The work takes place under the auspices of a Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government body: The National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG).<sup>2</sup> The task of the teams is laborious and difficult. Fragments of bodies, or items believed to be fragments of bodies, are painstakingly sifted from masses of substrate removed from the graves. Soil is washed away from exhumed substances, and the human remains are unravelled, with personal possessions, clothes, identity cards, bones, flesh and other soft tissues separated one from another. If a skeletal structure is recovered intact, it is disarticulated. Separate piles of collected bones and amassed soft flesh are created. These exhumations therefore have a very particular outcome, regardless of their status when unearthed. Human remains that could bear the traces of individual identity are almost always rendered anonymous.

Once transformed, bones and soft tissues are reinterred within purpose-built memorial sites. There is a network of these government-managed genocide memorials in Rwanda, overseen at the district level by CNLG's staff.<sup>3</sup> The crypts within the memorials house thousands of bones, divided by rough anatomical type and stored on shelving or in collective coffins. Memorials may be open for general public viewing and are a popular destination for tourists. These *kwibuka* (in Kinyarwanda literally translated as 'things or places to remember with') have pervasive residency, particularly in the south of Rwanda, where massacres during the genocide were most intense and where these reminders loom over quotidian space.<sup>4</sup> A journey along the main road from Kigali in south-central Rwanda to the southern city of Butare is powerfully illustrative of this effect, with a memorial standing at the roadside of almost every town and village along this densely populated route.

The Rwandan memorials are compelling. The presence of human remains within war memorials is not uncommon, but the manner in which these Rwandan remains are collectively treated, displayed and stored is highly unusual, in relation to both national and international memorial landscapes. High-profile mass grave exhumations and identification projects have taken place in many other parts of the world, particularly where significant international humanitarian presence has intervened in post-conflict public affairs, as has been the case in Rwanda.<sup>5</sup> The recovery and, where possible, the identification of remains are often understood to be a vital part of post-conflict reconciliation efforts, whether led by the state or by civil society and humanitarian groups, in order that bodies, and thus perhaps the deceased, might be reunited with relatives or at least be reorganized with the social space in which they once lived.<sup>6</sup> The outcome of this work, therefore, the determined discarding of remnants of individuated identities from bodily remains, is especially striking because it is undertaken by survivors of the genocide, and often those who may recognize the remains of specific living persons in amongst the mass of exhumed materials.

During 2011 and 2012, I worked in Rwanda alongside teams of volunteer survivor-exhumers and state officials as they carried out the exhumation and transformation of remains and the reintering of bones. This discussion draws upon participant observation work at the exhumations, and on interviews and conversations that accompanied the research. It focuses on the unearthing of human remains from mass graves by genocide survivors, and on the purposeful construction of large collectives of anonymous bones at the end of that process. I do not dwell on the significance of the bone memorials from the perspective of international visitors, nor do I dwell on the significance and intentions for the bones as ‘proof’ of genocide, as other reflections have, but turn back to the graveside and discuss the emergence and transformation of exhumed human remains via the hands of these Rwandan exhumers.<sup>7</sup> The lives of the survivor-exhumers and the fate of the unearthed bodies become enmeshed at the point of that unearthing. This paper sets out the basic architecture of that association and asks why identification of the remains is an ambiguous issue for these survivor-exhumers.

A response to this conundrum is framed by a comparison with the exhumations of mass graves deriving from the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939.<sup>8</sup> The two cases seem at first glance far removed, because the Spanish Civil War precipitated massacres inspired by perceived political or ideological sympathies, whilst the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda involved the mass persecution of persons based on perceived ethnic identity. Despite these differences, there are striking similarities between the two events. Political and ideological extremism were critical, and there is evidence of very particular forms of violence and violent social control in both cases. For example, in Spain, the war and its aftermath incited

public, highly ritualized manifestations of violence, ... high incidences of exemplary violence and public exposure of human remains ... rape and systematic acts of gendered and sexual violence ... [as well as] psychic violence in the form of print and radio propaganda that consisted of highly elaborated and obscene descriptions of violence, particularly threats of sexual violence. (Renshaw 2011, 23)

Very similar forms of violence and social control that took place during the Rwandan genocide are well documented (see, for instance, chapters in Taylor 1999 and HRW and Des Forges 1999).

In the decades following the end of the Spanish Civil War and the success of the nationalist campaign, state memorial commemoration in Spain focused solely on mourning the nationalist dead. A very effective state and locally enforced silence around the broader constitution of the

war was maintained during these years. This involved a broad denial of narrative nuance, careful control over the specificities of violence between people who remained familiars and the negation of the large numbers of Republican dead. Comparison with the scope of post-conflict narratives in Rwanda is also apt in this respect. My analysis here draws upon these shared characteristics and examines the way in which Spain's 'explosion of memory' since the early 2000s has catalysed campaigns to exhume and identify the bodies of individuals killed by nationalists during the civil war. It is the form of these exhumations, almost 60 years after the event, which can be fruitfully contrasted with the way in which the remains of genocide victims in Rwanda have been managed.

Specifically, I argue that the production of collectives of bones by the survivor-exhumers in Rwanda requires a kind of 'untangling'. This can be productively understood as an antithesis to the act of 'gathering-in' that Renshaw (2010, 2011) describes in her reflections on the exhumation and individual identification of victims of the Spanish Civil War. What Renshaw describes as 'affective' exhumations in Spain aimed to establish and bind individuated identity with specific human remains otherwise ambiguous in their histories – gathering together scientifically identified fragments of bodies, exhumed personal possessions and the first-hand recollections of the presence of specific individuals within the communities in which those individuals once lived. The Rwandan survivor-exhumers with whom I worked do believe that their kin are buried in the mass graves, familiars either through close family relationships or as members of the broader Tutsi community (contentious and complicated though that association might be). During the exhumations however, the material indicators of association between recovered remains and once living individuals is determinedly unravelled. I argue that the motivation to do so is heavily influenced by a situation in which social and economic security is understood to be tenuous. For many, participation in activities is influenced by allegiances to the RPF and the alleviations to insecurities that this allegiance offers. For the RPF, the genocide corpse as a symbol and as a spectacle is an entrenched and constantly circulating tool of political power, and these collective memorial remains have important capital in this respect. Given those pressures and desires, many of the exhumers saw interment of the bones within the memorial sites as fitting, or as an acceptable compromise in the absence of more traditional funerary rites and burial customs.

There is also an important similarity between the exhumations in Spain and Rwanda in the manner in which the 'agency' with which human remains are imbued (see Williams 2004) drives forward national political projects that aim to resolve or comfortably consolidate a collective memory of past conflict. In Spain, unidentified corpses demand forensic and affective identification – a project which 'gathers-in' and attempts to appease otherwise unsettling materials. In Rwanda however, it is the 'agency' imparted by the materiality or 'material qualities' (Ingold 2007) of the unearthed human remains that are harnessed in the pursuit of a national genocide memorial project. As 'felt presence' (cf. Filippucci et al. 2013) or as 'things to remember with', the affect that was so problematic in Spain is in Rwanda harnessed for the production of the memorial bones, which constitute an overwhelming presence entangled with a profound sense of absence, with the aim of solidifying a very particular post-conflict collective identity for both (certain) living people and the dead.

This analysis is not intended to suggest that work to produce these anonymous bones is necessarily robust in its logic. When closely examined, it is obvious that the memorial bones thus produced often provoke an unease amongst the survivor-exhumers, an ambiguity that is in part dictated by the materials themselves. Paradoxically, therefore, it is this presence (or absence) that provokes a hum of frisson at the heart of the memorials; a gentle parrying of a national public rhetoric that claims (or imposes) a particular kind of narrative and materially substantial certainty onto collective memory built around past conflict.

### Exhumation in post-genocide Rwanda

On the outskirts of a rapidly expanding suburb of Rwanda's capital city Kigali, a steep road winds up into the hills overlooking the city. Just as the urban sprawl becomes semi-rural villages, a mud track set to the left of the road meets the gates of a large compound. A modern administrative building, set into a manicured expanse of grass, shields the mass graves of Nyanza memorial site from view.

On the day that the first of the mass grave pits was to be opened, the state authorities explained to the small crowd of visibly and audibly anxious observers – many of whom were Tutsi who had survived the genocide, many of whom believed their relatives to be interred within the graves – that the crypts had been constructed in haste in 1995 using inadequate materials. Water was leaking into these spaces, which had been lined with cheap brick, the official explained, and the interred bodies were at risk of 'disappearing'. Work must be carried out to remove these people<sup>9</sup> so that the graves can be reconstructed and the bodies conserved properly so that they will remain as 'proof of genocide'. The air was thick with apprehension as the first sheet of concrete was slid back. Ignoring the protestations of officials, the crowd surged forward to peer into the dark space below. An observer wailed and fell to the ground, screaming and clawing at the clothing of the people around her.

Very many of the bodies placed inside these crypts had been killed on the same land, which had staged a massacre of thousands of Tutsi in April 1994. In August 1994, nearly a month after the *Inkotanye* [the RPF troops] announced that they had 'taken' Kigali, the remnants of these bodies were still visible on the hillside.<sup>10</sup> The scene at this location was familiar. Across the city and the surrounding countryside, thousands of corpses lay out in the open for weeks and months after death. As the front line of the *Inkotanye* moved south from the Ugandan border, vast numbers of people, both armed militia of the extremist Hutu government and Hutu and Tutsi civilians caught up in the violence, fled, most crossing national borders into neighbouring Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Those following in the footsteps of the *Inkotanye* forces, Tutsi refugee returnees who had been living in Uganda and Tanzania, described the country as appearing empty of all aside from the dead.<sup>11</sup> It was these people, along with survivors of the massacres, who initially gathered together bodies from across the city for burial. At Nyanza, large brick-lined pits had been sunk into the soil (most likely with the assistance of the Red Cross), with human remains rapidly interred within, recovered from the hillside and others from roadsides, abandoned properties and shallow graves all over the district.

As a result of this history, the bodies removed from the graves had often received crude preparation for interment.<sup>12</sup> Some were bundled in shrouds of cloth or in blankets, while others had been placed in coffins which had disintegrated into rotting wood fragments, bodies in tangles underneath. Many remains had obviously been scooped up with their surroundings: wrapped in a tent canvas or mixed in with a jumble of domestic items. A fine dust coated the men working from the bottom of the crypts as they piled the bones, bundles and milieu of materials into buckets to be handed up to other workers, or slung them onto tarpaulins suspended across the tops of the graves.

In the tumultuous months that immediately followed the genocidal massacres, those who had been able had travelled as best they could back to their homes, or the homes of their relatives, to see if they could locate missing people. As Jane explained, it was often upon return to households and the discovery of many bodies in shallow burial that excavation and exhumation became a common activity (Interview, Kigali, 8 May 2012). More 'traditional' burial in this region has generally been in soil graves, shortly after death, usually on the grounds of or close to homesteads. Bodies in the past were carefully wrapped in shrouds of banana leaves or cloth and interred as individuals, a practice that has strong echoes with the present day in which the careful

washing and dressing of the body are a common aspect of mortuary process.<sup>13</sup> Secondary burial is not commonplace and exhumation occurs only in unusual circumstances – family conflict over the location of a grave, for instance. The exhumations of mass graves from the 1990s that I witnessed and took part in 2011–2012 did not, therefore, fit an historical or cultural precedent.

I listened to the accounts of smaller, shallow, conflict grave exhumations that had taken place in the mid-1990s, and to descriptions of more recent and ongoing work to locate and exhume remains that varied from tens to reportedly hundreds of thousands of bodies.<sup>14</sup> Elements of both accounts were consistent. Bones, soft flesh, clothing and other personal items were separated from soil and set apart from each other. Family members washed the recovered bones in a very similar manner to the work described in the following. Informants at the exhumation sites consistently reminded me that the routine exhumation of human remains and the transformation of the recovered bodies that accompanied this process were ‘new’ work. All were ardent that there had been no history of this kind of handling of corpses prior to the genocide, and they were adamant that the genocide was unequivocally to blame. ‘These children should not see these things’, said Mary, indicating the younger student volunteers,<sup>15</sup> ‘it is only because of genocide’ (Conversation with informant, 5 May 2012). Over the course of my fieldwork it became evident that the act of exhumation and the ‘washing’ of the bones was a process that had become standardized over a number of years, emerging from a combination of local innovation and, most recently, RPF encouragement. The organized and purposeful reintering of bones into mass collectives of anonymous remains within the memorials is, however, one of the more recent and state-directed aspects of that work.

### Nyanza: ‘untangling’ remains

To the left of the crypts at Nyanza work takes place to untangle the remains from their wrappings. We stand on a large square of tarpaulin with our current lot of exhumed bodies stacked in a loose pile in the middle, a tangled mess of bone, clothing, funeral shrouds, and wood fragments. Work is methodical. The team encircle the bodies and pick away at the edges of the stack of corpses, slowly they will work their way in to the middle. Clothes to one side, bones to the other, personal possessions and identity cards placed in a cardboard box which is tucked away under a chair. The bones that most obviously protrude from the pile are removed first. The long bones of the arms and legs are tugged away. The skulls which are relatively heavy are scattered around the outside of the pile and are scooped up and into the bowls at our feet in which the disentangled bones are placed, ready to be moved on to a group that will wash them of soft decay and soil.

The process is unnervingly like undressing a living person. Leg bones are still inside trousers, ribs sit inside the chest of woolen jumpers, hooked into the knit of the material. Personal possessions are knotted in between all of the clothing ... here a tiny knitted orange jumper ... there a tube of toothpaste and toothbrush neatly tucked into the pocket of a tweed-print jacket ... a school exercise book rolled up and pushed into the pocket of child’s shorts ... a glass jar in a plastic shopping bag – an unidentifiable liquid sloshing around in the bottom ... jewelry ... These items are dug out of pockets filled with the shells of insects, whispery fragments – falling out of the hems of jackets and trousers and pressed into the fabric of clothes. The beetles fill the insides of socks, otherwise weighed down with the small bones of the toe and heel. We turn the socks inside-out, peeling out the bones. When the socks are first handled it feels as though a whole fleshy foot is contained; shades of insects have filled the space where the soft tissue would be.

The team works hard. On a good day when we are not too tired the group can unpack a three foot high corpse pile in just a few hours. When everything is finished all that will be left is a neat pile of fine dust in the center of the mat. (Edited from field notes, Kigali, June 2011)

Once the skeletal remains are disarticulated, the bones are passed onto small teams which sit around bowls of soapy washing-up water. The bones are rigorously scrubbed of any perceived dirt, and sometimes of the remnants of soft flesh. The bones are divided according to a loosely



defined type and the piles spread out to dry in the sun on large squares of tarpaulin. In the evenings the group gathered up the edges of the tarpaulins and carefully carried the piles to a large hall within the memorial site buildings where they would be kept behind locked and guarded doors. These piles of skeletal remains were, thus, ready for placement in communal coffins within the reconstructed crypts.

Larger mass graves in Rwanda, such as Nyanza, may contain hundreds or thousands of corpses.<sup>16</sup> Human remains might consist of partially intact skeletal remnants, sometimes remaining contained in clothing, or they may be fragments, embedded in thick soil and include the remnants of soft tissue. Nevertheless, each fragment is given the same attention, the same care, each is worried over and turned over and over again in hand. The work was physically demanding and emotionally arduous. Working amongst the exhumers, it was obvious that this process was deeply uncomfortable and viscerally evocative of violent moments of the past. More specifically, it was a space in which an ethic of pragmatism sat alongside intimate moments and materials:

Amongst the exhumers at Nyanza were Eda and her sister May. We have worked together untangling bodies at the tarpaulin for a number of days. Both sisters are almost silent, in stark contrast to the constant conversation around us, and relative to Jane who manages a stream of constant and almost deafening gossip.

Eda looks up and smiles at me during our work. We share a task that is unofficially our own – once all of the substantial remains are removed we take the edges of the thick tarpaulin and lift them up each in turn, shaking and sliding the soft earth into the middle. Eda takes great care over this task, and I can understand the salve in the finality – a small dark heap of soil alone in the middle of the bright orange tarpaulin.

The final three tarpaulins that we work through today are a jumble of bones wrapped tightly in the knots of decayed woolen blankets. The group is wearily shifting through the piles. We have been here for long hours and the work is becoming labored. May grapples with a bone at the edge of her pile, eventually ripping the wool to extract it. This bone is unusual, a long thin metal rod implanted into the side. May leans forward to inspect the metal, her hand pressed to her stomach. It is the first time I have seen anyone look afraid. Now lots of people are peering over. The sisters are whispering to each other. Eda pushes close to May to look at the bone on the ground. One of the university students stands up from her own task and leans in to say quietly:

‘It is her [their] brother, Matthew’.

Eda and May have put the bone with the rest of the recovered remains, in the bucket on one side. For a while I think they will continue working. May is wiping tears with her hand whilst picking through the rubble with the other. Nobody approaches them, nobody stops working, although a subdued hush falls over the group.

Eventually Eda sits on one of the plastic chairs at the side of the tarpaulin and covers her face with the headscarf that has been wrapped around her hair. After some time, she brushes off her skirt and walks around to the enormous pile of clothes that we have removed from the corpse bundles and which are now dumped at the side of the site [these, unlike the bones, are not afforded any further attention]. Talking softly to those sitting nearby, describing a shirt and trousers, she picks through the clothes that have recently been put on the pile and squints few a pieces, as if they are something, but then puts them back, perhaps nothing in the end. Then, as if the incident had not happened, the women go back to their work at the tarpaulins. The bones of their brother are carried off and disappeared into the piles of other remains held in the washing up bowls. (Edited from field notes, Kigali, 23 June 2011)

Anita found evidence of her father’s body amongst the remains, picking out his brown overcoat and old pipe and talking quietly with the small group that had gathered around her. Shortly afterwards these items were cast aside with the rest of the clothes, not to be returned to again. Much the same was carried out in the handling of bones and ID cards found bundled together in plastic bags.

A greasy blackened heap is intermingled with charred bones, an apparently ineffectual attempt to burn the remains with rubbish. With these bodies we also find a wallet. Inside are ID cards, belonging to a number of family members. The writing almost faded away although here and there we can squint at words. Anne-Marie and Aimee are the names on each of the separate cards which are Canadian Health Insurance identifiers, along with a laminated birth certificate from an Ontario hospital.

Shortly afterwards the ID cards are placed in the battered cardboard box under the seating at the back of the seat. According to the site coordinators, it is IBUKA who will decide what to do with these. The bodies are moved on to the buckets to be disarticulated. (Edited from field notes 22 June 2011)

### **‘Affective identification’ and conflict remains in Spain**

These bits and pieces of individual bodies: clothing, personal possessions, ID cards, bones and skin are in other forensic and vernacular mass grave exhumations interpreted as substantial if not critical information, which would be used to establish the identity of the individual and/or the specific history of the mass grave site (see e.g. Fontein 2014). Forensic technique dictates that the structure and content of the mass grave be carefully documented, including photographic or detailed notes on the position in which the remains were found. Renshaw’s (2010, 2011) work examining the exhumation and identification of victims of the Spanish Civil War serves as a useful reflection on these more familiar processes, in which individualized identification of anonymous remains is the driving concern of exhumers. Renshaw details the process through which forensic teams and the friends and relatives of the deceased in Spain draw conclusions with regard to the identities of sets of remains. ‘Scientific identification’ employs anatomical information gleaned from skeletal structures, as well as materials that surround corpses, such as clothing, shoes and personal effects, and compares these with information about the appearance and anatomy of the deceased drawn from family and local community. Alongside this, Renshaw notes, runs a process of ‘locally meaningful conceptualizations of identity’ (2010, 454). This process consists of, for example, the generation and circulation of conversation about the unique personal traits of particular dead people in life. This might include moments in which personal items and skeletal structure were displayed and discussed: a process that Renshaw argues ‘renders the reality of their pre-death existence a tangible reality, allowing them to be more readily imagined as they were in life’ (2010, 457). These processes, this ‘reiterating of familial bones with the dead, reinserting them into social networks’, allows ‘affective identification’ to be achieved. Renshaw (2010) describes this as a kind of ‘gathering-in’.

At the Rwandan mass grave exhumations, the distancing of personal items from bodies, and the disarticulating and collectivizing of remains mean something akin to an antithesis to this kind of ‘gathering-in’ and ‘affective identification’ takes place. For even when the bodies, or body parts, or personal items were evidently identifiable as belonging to an individual, precisely because of their close association with sets or fragments of remains, these bundles of familiar remains were deliberately disassociated from the bodies. Thus, as opposed to the process in Spain, which sought to encourage recognition of the dead as associated with sets of remains, the Rwandan exhumation process did not intend to rebuild associative bonds between the living and the bodies of deceased individuals. Instead, the acts dissipated the remnants of those bonds. This was a profound *untangling* of individuated material substance rather than a ‘gathering-in’. What emerges from this process is a mass of bones that imply a vast dead, one in which the specific detail and texture of the life in which these bones were once embedded is obscured.

Understanding the influences upon this process requires first a turn to the practical issue of the assembling of memories and bodies of the dead for those concerned with the exhumations. Here a comparison between Rwandan and the Spanish exhumations is useful – an examination of the differences in the passage of time, national political agendas and the form of memory at work amongst the key stakeholders in these exhumation processes.

The Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939 marked a period of deep political divide. The right-wing nationalist defeat of republican forces in 1939 heralded a 40-year dictatorship led by General Francisco Franco. Although atrocities were committed on both sides during the civil war, the years of dictatorship that followed involved the ongoing persecution and execution of individuals perceived to have republican loyalties or at least left-leaning sympathies (Aguilar and Humlebaek 2002; Graham 2004; Renshaw 2011). During the years of Franco's regime, the commemoration of the deaths of nationalist supporters was the focus of national commemoration. The death of Franco's victims, and their graves, was left unacknowledged. A politically motivated and locally enforced regime of silence around the massacres of perceived republican sympathizers persisted throughout Franco's dictatorship.<sup>17</sup> This silence was bolstered, and in many senses continued, partly because of the manner in which civilians were drawn into the murder of familiars during the violence, what Graham called a 'fellowship of blood' (2004, 315).

As Renshaw notes,

the democratic transition that followed the end of Franco's regime was not easy ... a political amnesty was granted indicating the desire for a clean break from the past. The period of consensus that emerged is popularly characterized in Spain as 'the pact of silence' or, most tellingly, 'the pact of amnesia'. (2011, 25)

This was in part necessary, as Graham also argues, precisely because of the involvement of 'ordinary' Spaniards in the expedition of violence (2004, 324). Graham writes:

it was *widespread social fear* that underlay the 'pact of silence': the fears of those who were complicit, the fear and guilt of the families and heirs of those who denounced and murdered, as well as those who *were* denounced and murdered. (2004, 324)

The 'explosion of memory' in Spain that began with a political shift, driven largely by a cultural elite in the early 2000s, opened up a conversation about the histories of the war amongst the descendants of those who had been killed and buried within the mass graves under examination.<sup>18</sup> Memorial campaigns associated with this shift mobilized the drive towards exhumation and identification in a situation in which identification of the individual could be considered as, Renshaw argues, 'politically neutral'. Projects to exhume and identify the dead following war are always complex. In Spain, identity, or rather the act of recognizing a body as belonging to a specific person, required this shift in the parameters of permitted public reconciliation of the conflict; it also required the participation of forensic teams in the drawing together of bones and other materials belonging to individuals alongside the regenerating of memories of that person, memories both of their appearance and of their presence within the community in which that memory was regenerated. This was very public work, encouraging conversation about the past, and sometimes the literal re-association of the body, of notions of the form of the body or of personal possessions in amongst buildings and homes. This encouragement was necessary as the passage of time, and past impositions of a state imposed silence around aspects of the past, rendered those recollections fragile for that generation which might yet have retained remnants of first-hand memory.

### **The untangling of conflict remains in Rwanda**

The propriety of state governance in Rwanda is the subject of polarized and embittered scholarly debate. The RPF-led Rwandan government has been upheld by some as a model of good practice in post-conflict governance, whilst simultaneously hounded by accusations from others that it is

authoritarian and heavy-handed (Reyntjens 2006, 2010; Beswick 2010; Straus and Waldorf 2011). State imposition upon rural and urban poor in Rwanda has been a subject for particular ire, with economic and social activity very closely controlled by a Kigali-based elite with, it has been argued, limited affinity with the populace (Ingalaere 2010, 2014). Careful control over public recollection of past conflict has formed a significant focus of that concern, with allegations that the democratic politic is a visage (Pottier 2002) assisted by a reiteration of the RPF's association with victims of the genocide, and the guilt of the international community in its failure to intervene in 1994.

A vast number of activities and events, including the presence of memorials, constantly remind Rwandans that genocide occurred. Despite protestations that this presence is overbearing, and even a hindrance to reconciliation, it is also necessarily a limited form of representation. The manner in which war memorials impose forgetting and silencing, as well as an ongoing remembrance of certain aspects of the past, is a familiar notion in the expansive academic literature on memorialization and commemoration (for example, Rowlands 1999). Implicit within a national drive to enshrine a specific form of memory of genocide in Rwanda is a persistence of silence around aspects of the violence of the 1990s; for example, in relation to the activities of the RPF army in the aftermath of the genocide, or indeed during its armed incursions into Rwanda before and during 1994.

Reticence around full disclosure in relation to events of the past is, however, more complex than the assertion that the state suppresses divergent or full recollection of certain events or activities. Rwandans are also very careful or conflicted in their discussions and recollections, especially if they were present during the genocide.<sup>19</sup> Genocide testimony at public remembrance events, for instance, tends to follow a pattern in which the perpetrator and the victim are clearly identified and in which there is an enforced clarity about the passage of events. The reality of conflict in general, and of course in Rwanda, is that this kind of violence and public disorder produces periods of great confusion, the intentions and allegiances of people appear unpredictable and day-to-day life is mired in uncertainty. The report by HRW and Des Forges (1999) details the manner in which misinformation about events and the generation of uncertainty about the identities of people were more than incidental during the genocide. It was a deliberate and meticulously embedded strategy, critical to the success of the extremist government's genocidal campaign. This confusion of war continues post-genocide. In many cases post-conflict, for instance, perpetrators and victims were not readily discernable, and claiming the identity of a Tutsi genocide survivor was a risky process with very serious consequences if recognition was not attained.

The survivor-exhumers I worked with were open about their support for the RPF. However, where this support was discussed in detail (as opposed to being a polite indication), it was not couched in the same language as that used to describe the government in the national public rhetoric, but referred rather to the roots of the RPF as the 'Inkotanye'. This indicates not the 'government of liberation', as is used in popular political propaganda, but the 'army of liberation' – the soldiers who survivors might recall as having rescued them from genocide. The language used by this group, and the manner in which ethnicity was referred to frequently in discussing the past and the present, chimes with other work indicating that despite the RPF's attempts to quell public expression of ethnic categorizations,<sup>20</sup> such categories continue to be highly salient and tied to both remembrance of the past and the organization of social lives in the present (Buckley-Zistel 2009; Thomson 2011b; McLean Hilker 2012). Such expressions of identity were also tied to diverse opinions on reconciliation, in terms of both organized state reconciliation policies and the extent to which local interpersonal reconciliation was felt to be appropriate or possible. This constituted lively chatter at the exhumation sites with sometimes vehement expressions of anger and resentment against perpetrators of the killings often meeting disapproval from others. This is appropriate in a context in which it is widely acknowledged that Rwandans do

not agree on how to remember or reconcile the genocide or associated conflicts. Similarly, the involvement of these people with state memorialization was a complex negotiation, in which some efforts and policies were embraced and others quietly resisted.<sup>21</sup>

A sense of everyday risk for the genocide survivors persists. People with whom I worked still considered their security to be very tenuous. This was a considerable influence on their motivation to support the RPF and take part in the exhumations. Our conversations, for example, were punctuated by a quiet anxiety about their lives in neighbourhoods amongst people whom they 'did not know'. For some this anxiety was accompanied by resentment and fear about the necessity of living amongst people who they held responsible for the deaths of their relatives and the loss of their livelihoods. This is by no means an unreported concern; scholars working in Rwanda have written extensively on the difficulties of living within these kinds of neighbourhoods post-genocide, and of the 'chosen amnesia' (Buckley-Zistel 2006) that is necessary in order that day-to-day activities can be undertaken.

In such circumstances, it would be difficult for knowledge of the dead to be 'gathered-in' in the way that 'affective identification' has been established in Spain. In Rwanda the assembling of information and physical objects in this way would present a myriad of very real problems. It may open up difficult memories of the past within the community, conversations which would again raise the issue of who did what to whom during the killings. These questions were tackled during the Gacaca trials to an extent, but under a very different framing (see e.g. Clark 2010; Thomson 2011a). Open conversation about past lives in these situations would provoke questions about personal histories and the benefits to which genocide survivors are privileged. The issue of rights to land and property would again become salient, assets that survivors worry that they have only a tenuous hold over, and retain only because of the backing of the state.

Furthermore, the genocide and associated conflicts of the 1990s served to fragment the familiar domestic spaces in which the dead might otherwise have been appropriately reorganized (Hertz 1960). Eda and May, for instance, the sisters described in the ethnographic extract earlier, lost most of their close relatives during the genocide and had now found somewhat tenuous residence with distant relations with whom they were not closely associated prior to 1994. Their situation reflects that of many of those working at the sites – an established identity as a Tutsi survivor of the genocide provided a modicum of security in the form of housing and monetary benefits from the state, but whose lives were empty of the material 'stuff' which might attach them to the past. These people spoke of the keen loss they felt in relation to houses, gardens and even clothing which had been lost to the wars. They spoke of living diminished lives, haunted by the ghosts of these possessions, and only left with, in their eyes, hollow replacements.<sup>22</sup>

The RPF's organization of these mass grave exhumations was part of a wider project to move all of the bodies of Tutsi genocide victims into memorials. This included those who had been buried on homesteads in individual graves, for whom families had been able to carry out some semblance of 'normal' funeral rites. District officials described their role in this respect as being to gradually nudge people towards exhumation and relocation. It was these activities that evoked the most diverse public, even if still very reserved, expressions of opinion in relation to the exhumations.

Some of those I spoke with seemed happy with these arrangements. John, for example, pointed out the patch of ground outside of his house where the remains of his family had once been buried and expressed his satisfaction that they had been moved, later taking me into the nearby town centre to show me the small community memorial where the bones had been housed. Now, he said, he could sell the land on which the old burial plot stood (field notes, Kigali, 1 July 2012). Others asked me what the alternative would be. One man asked

incredulously if I could imagine him standing alone with his one remaining sibling, in his isolated village, mourning at the grave of his family. He was insistent that such activity would be dangerous (Interview, Kigali, 27 June 2012). There was quiet concern about simmering resentments amongst those members of the community who were able neither to publicly acknowledge the deaths of their relatives during the conflict, nor to draw on public support to search for or bury the bodies of those whose deaths did not sit comfortably within the formal category of Tutsi genocide victim.

There were also, sometimes, mutterings of discomfort with the exhumations amongst the survivors themselves. At the end of the exhumation work at Cyanika (the second of my long-term field sites), June brought the body of her grandfather to the memorial. This man had been killed before the 1994 genocide in an act of violence inspired by the pre-genocide government's sporadic hate campaigns against the Tutsi. Her grandfather had received 'traditional' burial and was carefully wrapped in shrouds. When I viewed the body, it was laid out next to the disarticulated remnants of corpses on which we had been working. June was unwilling to discuss the exhumation of the body and what would happen to the remains. I did not find her grandfather's body again, at least not articulated, amongst the remains that we placed inside the memorial.

It is clear that in Rwanda, as in Spain, human remains emerge into an already complicated field in which individual opinion and circumstance, and national political agendas are entangled. The revealing of these human remains at the point of exhumation is a critical moment in this process. It is a moment when a shift begins between what is desired by the living and what is made possible or prohibited by the presence of exhumed bones, flesh and other fragments of the corpses of the dead.

### **The 'affect' of anonymous human remains in Spain and Rwanda**

Despite the obvious differences between recent exhumations in Spain and Rwanda, there are also important points of similarity. In both contexts, buried bodies and remains demand additional attention. In both places discussion about the past awakes or is driven by a desire to confront the remains of the dead, under the encumbrance that their burials, without the usual mortuary rituals, are 'incomplete' or unsatisfactory, or 'without dignity', as the survivor-exhumers in Rwanda put it.<sup>23</sup> A circumstance felt to be a continuation of the corporeal violations suffered by the victims at their death.<sup>24</sup> Resolving those violations has, in some ways, and in both places, become part of a national political agenda that aims to consolidate a politically convenient or at least prudent collective memory of past conflict.

In Spain human remains emerge via the hands of forensic scientists who exercise some authority over what comprises the physical limits, or 'edges', of exhumed bodies, and who make relatively definitive decisions as to the form and origin of each fragment. In Rwanda, these 'edges' are more difficult to locate, provoking considerable debate and anxiety over which substances sifted from the exhumed materials of the graves once constituted human remains. In both cases, once identified as *human* remains, 'the presence of the dead' as framed by Williams (2004, 265),

provides an agency to affect the experience and actions of mourners and evoke memories of the past, rather than serving as a static and passive set of substances manipulated and disposed of by the mourners to serve their socio-political ends.

Williams argues that it is not only the act of reburial, or memorial interment, that catalyses an accompanying reorganization of sociopolitical space (as a function of funeral rituals – see Bloch and Parry 1982), but also the presence of corporeal materials – 'the body' of deceased – that intervenes in collective action. Following a similar vein of analysis, Filippucci et al. (2013) identified

this ‘agency’ of corporeal materials in the ‘felt presence’ of human remains that they suggest is indicative not just of an affective force of presence, but of absence too. In this view, human remains are active and unsettling precisely in the way that they elide full expression and stability. They are excessive to and never fully stable in meaning (Filippucci et al. 2013, 211), but are rather always implicated in problematic, open-ended processes of ‘becoming’, an indeterminate existence that begins but does not (and cannot) end with their emergence from the graves, or even with their re-interment in new collective memorials.

In Spain this demanding ‘agency’ or ‘affect’ of human remains drives forward the hard (and necessarily incomplete) work of associating individual identities with specific sets of remains. The presence of anonymous bones inspires the imaginative and material work of gathering-in and binding individuated dead to particular sets of remains; even if, as Renshaw points out, some people remain unable or unwilling to see past the existence of these things as ‘only bones’ (Renshaw 2010, 454). In Rwanda, this same ‘affective force’ of human remains is also harnessed, but in a very different way. Here the demanding, affective, excessivity of anonymous remains is deliberately left unresolved. In fact we could go further and argue that the excessive affective qualities of human remains that proved so problematic in Spain is in Rwanda deliberately harnessed and exaggerated by the deliberate untangling of material and corporeal remnants of the dead, which might otherwise be assigned individuated, ‘remembered’ or ‘affective identification’ of the kind that Renshaw describes.

Part of this kind of work on collective human remains is about the ritual reorganization of the dead, and how this is entangled with the production of history. In a sense this is historiography done through ‘substances’: problematic and excessive and demanding, flesh, bones and other human stuff. If in Spain the ‘gathering-in’ and subsequent reburial of human remains from the civil war are intended to reorganize and re-present the dead as *individuals* within communities, then in Rwanda this reorganization is not intended to re-present the dead as once living, individual persons, but rather as an undifferentiated collective of genocide victims (and therefore necessarily Tutsi, although this can scarcely be formally stated). The bodies of the amassed dead are reorganized and re-substantiated with the intention of literally embedding a single collective Tutsi genocide victim within communities. And once the material evidence of individual identities is disassociated, the mass of bones become part of a memorial complex which is intended to productively consolidate a dominant narrative of the past that is closely tied to RPF politics and legitimacy. This contrasts with Spain, where the individuating processes of affective identification could be said to be part of an ongoing *response to* a long dominant and exclusivist narrative of the past, which was tied to a long period of impunity or ‘pact of silence’ that crossed over the transition to democracy after Franco’s death.

If the purpose of the memorials in Rwanda is to give some sense of collective presence, then it is, perhaps necessarily, an uneasy one. Harnessing the affective excessivity of human remains for the construction of a single collective dead, for the purposes of constituting a single dominant narrative, is always likely to be problematic and incomplete. As Fontein’s account of war-veteran-led vernacular exhumations in Zimbabwe reveals, the ‘uncertainties provoked by the torque of human materiality’ are not always ‘sustainable’ or ‘easily containable’, and always threaten to overwhelm any ‘political utility’ (Fontein 2014, 134). It is therefore not surprising that the ritual reburial of exhumed and collectivized remains in Rwanda’s state memorials does not always seem to function as intended. Certainly they do not necessarily offer ‘closure’ or containment. For many survivor-exhumers the ‘spectral quality’ (Filippucci et al. 2013, 6) that the remains imbued continued to evoke anxiety. There was a worrying over the bones that often continued post-re-interment. The exhumers spoke of their inability to ‘stop looking’ at the remains, as if they too, rather like the bones, were caught perpetually ‘in-between’, incomplete and unfinished. This was best verbalized by one of the survivors who, when I asked if she would visit the memorial site now

that it was finished, answered sharply that she would move her bed in there if she could so that she would never have to stop looking at the bones (Conversation with informant, Cyanika, June 2012).

There is, therefore, an ambiguity that ultimately sits at the heart of these exhumation and collectivizing activities. Although disassociating individual identity from the bones in the pursuit of a coherent collective is key to the processes I have described, it was not at all clear that many of those involved were sure that this *should* or *could* be achieved. The dead were not yet clearly or fully ‘collectivized’, or necessarily comfortably located in their association with these anonymized bones, and therefore, perhaps, not yet fully ‘rested’, or completely ‘buried’ as such. In these circumstances, for many survivor-exhumers, a continued dwelling, or comfortable proximity brought at least temporary relief from something akin to a discomforting and haunting sense of absence.<sup>25</sup> This explains (beyond the sense of security that involvement with the RPF-sponsored memorializations promised) the personal commitment of many survivor-exhumers to the hard and meticulous labour the exhumations involved, particularly those who constituted a core group that travelled from site to site to exhume mass graves in many locations. And I have also, therefore, come to view the memorials that result from these exhumations as repositories for the profound, excessive uncertainties carried with or exuding from the bones stored within them. These spaces, in which the state’s hard-fought-for script of the past is intended to be certain, inevitably encounters, and can grate against, the expressions of grief, loss and uncertainty that continue to plague participants and other stakeholders in this emergent corporeal historiography, and the broader, open-ended construction and reconstruction of memory in Rwanda with which it is enveloped.

## Conclusions

There are valid and important discussions to be had about the propriety of undertaking exhumation work in this way, given the difficulties that continue to plague freedom of speech in Rwanda (both state imposed and as necessarily manifest in the workings of life post-genocide). As others have noted (Jessee 2010), it is not possible in present-day Rwanda for a full and open disclosure of opinions and perspectives on the memorialization of the genocide or the burial of its human remains. It is unclear when such expression might be possible; it was 40 years before people in Spain could begin to approach the issue.

In Spain, the desire for exhumations and the drive to ‘gather-in’ human bones, biographies and other remnants of the civil war, in order to reconstitute the dead as individuals located within historical communities, has been driven by a gnawing sense, and increasingly vocal acknowledgement, that silence about the past could not be resolved amidst mass graves containing uncertain bodies with unknown histories. The sense of ‘absence’ that these troubling human remains evoked grew as conversations about their pasts made them very literally present.

In Rwanda, the remains of the dead also demand attention and the exhumers are similarly driven to respond to the distressing presence of uncertain bodies buried ‘without dignity’, without the due attention of those who cared about them in life. However, unlike in Spain, and perhaps only for the meantime, the settling of this deeply troubling past is not, it seems, to be achieved through public displays and discussion of past lives, elaborately reconstructed, stabilized and contained as well as contested from the excessive and affective potentialities of human remains. For those involved in the exhumations, a fragile security circles around the careful, controlled maintenance of certain silences. The affective ability of human bones to demand attention, and the sense of ongoing and disruptive presence that they exude, has become the means through which a collective, politically amenable, identity is being



consolidated. Ultimately incomplete, and always potentially uncontrollable, this amounts to a wielding of uncertainty in the pursuit of a more certain future.

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the editor Joost Fontein, and also to John Harries, Beckie Marsland and members of the Anthropology Ph.D. cohort at University of Edinburgh, for their very generous and helpful commentary on versions of this paper. Finally, I am very grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Funding

Research was supported by a UK Economic and Social Research Council studentship [ES.I012729/1].

### Notes

1. Many volumes have been dedicated to this event and its causes, see, for example, Eltringham (2004), HRW and Des Forges (1999), Pottier (2002), Prunier (1995, 2009), Taylor (1999), Reyntjens (1995), Lemarchand (2009) and Mamdani (2000).
2. <http://www.cnlg.gov.rw>.
3. At the two exhumation sites that I examined in detail, the memorials were also supervised at a local level, both formally and informally, by genocide survivors.
4. There is a long history of deep political and social division between northern and southern Rwanda. During colonial occupation and after independence, political shifts in the central Kigali government have swayed according to regional allegiances. The extremist Hutu government's affiliation with Northern Rwanda, for instance, was the precipitant for the relocation and resettlement of a large number of Tutsi to the South. When the RPF began its incursions in the 1990s, most forcefully as an invading army in 1994, soldiers breached the borders in the North of the country first. Along with a greater density of population who could be identified as Tutsi, there was therefore also arguably more time for massacres to be committed by genocidaires in the southern Districts (see HRW and Des Forges 1999). The distribution of grave exhumations subsequently mirrors the predominance of genocide massacres in the south of the country. I did attend exhumations in the north of the country, but in my conversations with overseeing officials in the northern districts it was confirmed that mass graves containing genocide dead were unevenly weighted towards the south. These officials argued that their task was to locate the 'missing' Tutsi – less density of population (generally, as well as in terms of ethnic distribution) allowed killings to be more easily hidden in the north. The history of the war in northern Rwanda is also somewhat different from that in the south and the politics surrounding exhumation in this area is incredibly sensitive.
5. Although international humanitarian presence was almost entirely absent at the exhumations I attended.
6. Other scholars have examined these kinds of exhumations elsewhere, including from Argentina's 'Dirty War' (Crossland 2000; Robben 2005); and from massacres in Bosnia (Wagner 2008), Cyprus (Sant Cassia 2005) and Northern Uganda (Jahn and Wilhelm-Solomon, *forthcoming*).
7. For example, Guyer (2009) and Caplan (2007) both offer reflections on the Rwandan bone memorials from the perspective of a personal visit, or that of an international visitor.
8. Those familiar with the Srebrenica massacre might wonder why this case has not been the focus for comparison within this paper. Although there is an interesting comparison to be found, the unprecedented DNA identification project being undertaken at Srebrenica would lend itself more appropriately to a comparative analysis of the effect of international intervention in post-conflict mass grave exhumations, than to a reflection on the entanglements between survivors and bodies of the dead, for which the Spanish case is more appropriate.

9. The official in this case was the head of IBUKA – the national umbrella organization for genocide survivor organisations. Although understood to be a charity, this organisation works closely with the RPF and its activities are in many ways inseparable from that of the state. The head offices of IBUKA are located just behind the mass graves and the exhumations were managed as a partnership between an overseer from CNLG and officials from these offices.
10. My informants' recollections of these events were understandably patchy. For a detailed published description of these events, see African Rights (2001); also HRW and Des Forges (1999, 615–618).
11. This was very vivid in the memory of Peter, who had gathered together his family and crossed the border from Uganda as soon as he heard that the RPF had secured Kigali: 'there were bodies, everywhere, *everywhere!*' he said, wrinkling his nose, 'it was very bad, and those bodies, they were fresh!' ('fresh' meaning that they were not yet bones) (field notes, Kigali, 3 March 2012).
12. Each exhumation site held its own nuances. For example, further south, at Cyanika, the dead had been shovelled into deep earth pits and not only was clothing often separate from bone, but also many of the bodies were recovered with substantial soft tissue. Despite these nuances, the exhumation processes were broadly similar at each site and for narrative consistency I focus here on the Nyanza excavation.
13. There are echoes between the washing of the remains at the exhumation sites and the preparations of corpses for burial in more everyday circumstances. Despite attendants' insistence that this was 'new' work, it could not help but echo familiar practices in some ways. Not all burials within Rwanda are inspired by Christian tradition as there is a significant Muslim population. My informants declared a range of religious affinities although very few drew attention to these during the exhumations and interment. Memorial services in Rwanda frequently contain elements of Catholicism and there are important links to be made between Catholic funerary traditions and this work, although this is beyond the scope of this paper. Finally, although all informants quoted here are women, this is a product of happenstance: both men and women took part in the various aspects of the exhumation and transformation process. In a more traditional everyday mortuary process, attendance to the dead is dictated by kin ties and not strictly governed by gender.
14. This included professional and amateur films of both exhumation contexts.
15. There was often pressure on local officials to meet specific timelines in the exhumation of graves, usually as the memorials were to be dedicated during remembrance week, which takes place in April. At both sites at which I spent concentrated time, work by the core group of survivor-exhumers was accompanied by assistance by other groups of people. At Nyanza this included volunteers from student genocide survivor groups. In Cyanika, rather more controversially, the wider community was recruited under the auspices of *umuganda* – monthly compulsory community service.
16. Local reports of number of dead recovered from graves, particularly mass graves of this size, should be approached cautiously. There is often great pressure upon Rwandan officials and journalists to emphasize that large numbers of bodies are contained within graves. Although there were most certainly thousands of remains interred at Nyanza, the exact numbers presented by media reports were necessarily estimates given the extremely fragmented skeletal remains, even if these reports were not presented as such.
17. There is a comparison to be made here between this situation and the lack of acknowledgement of the deaths of a broader spectrum of Rwandans during the larger and longer conflict within which the genocide of the Tutsi was embedded.
18. Not without continued resistance by many Spaniards who had lived under the conditions of 'imposed amnesia', the exhumations remain a contentious issue within national politics (Aguilar and Humlebaek 2002).
19. The exception here would be a younger and relatively wealthy generation of Rwandans, often descendants of the so-called old-case-load Tutsi returnees, who speak much more freely.
20. In line with Rwandan state's reconciliation efforts, identification on the basis of ethnic categorization – Hutu, Tutsi or Twa – is banned.
21. This is keeping with Thomson's (2011b) observations of everyday resistance amongst Rwandans.
22. Although the Gacaca court process officially closed in 2012, the process of collecting and issuing fines and returning property according to the decisions of those courts is still in process. Many of the people I worked with were involved in this process. I suspect that their prominence as survivors was important to the expediency with which their claims were processed (see e.g. Clark's 2010 and Thomson's 2011a commentary on the Gacaca courts).
23. Burial 'with' or 'without' dignity references the treatment of the bodies of genocide victims at their deaths, and in the latter case, the intended purpose of exhumation and re-interment of the remains.

The terms are widely employed in Rwanda amongst, for example, genocide survivor advocacy groups, and state officials who made frequent references to the term in conversations and interviews. My informants also used the phrase, for example, conversation with my informant Benjamin who instructed me to tell other people why the remains are washed, that I must explain to people that '[we] have to bury them with dignity ... you know, because when they are like this they are not like people' (field notes, Kigali, 20 June 2011).

24. See, for example, the similar point made by Fontein (2014).
25. This sense of discomfort is mirrored in accounts and descriptions of the memorials by Caplan (2007), Guyer (2009) and Aguilar (2009).

## References

- African Rights. 2001. *Left to Die at ETO and Nyanza: The Stories of Rwandese Civilians Abandoned by UN Troops on 11 April 1994*. Witness to Genocide: Issue 13. London: African Rights.
- Aguilar, P. 2009. *Theology, Liberation and Genocide: A Theology of the Periphery*. London: SCM Press.
- Aguilar, P., and C. Humlebaek. 2002. "Collective Memory and National Identity in the Spanish Democracy: The Legacies of Francoism and the Civil War." *History and Memory: Studies in the Representation of the Past* 14: 121–164.
- Beswick, D. 2010. "Managing Dissent in a Post-genocide Environment: The Challenge of Political Space in Rwanda." *Development and Change* 41 (2): 225–251.
- Bloch, M., and J. Parry. 1982. "Introduction: Death and the Regeneration of Life." Chap. 1 in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, edited by Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, 1–44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buckley-Zistel, S. 2006. "Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-genocide Rwanda." *Africa* 76 (2): 131–150.
- Buckley-Zistel, S. 2009. "Nation, Narration, Unification? The Politics of History Teaching after the Rwandan Genocide." *Journal of Genocide Research* 11 (1): 31–53.
- Caplan, Pat. 2007. "'Never Again' Genocide Memorials in Rwanda." *Anthropology Today* 23 (1): 20–22.
- Clark, Phil. 2010. *The Gacaca Courts, Post-genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice Without Lawyers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crossland, Z. 2000. "Buried Lives: Forensic Archaeology and Argentina's Disappeared." *Archaeological Dialogues* 7 (2): 146–159.
- Eltringham, N. 2004. *Accounting for Horror: Post-genocide Debates in Rwanda*. London: Pluto Press.
- Filippucci, Paola, Joost Fontein, John Harries, and Cara Krmpotich. 2013. "Encountering the Past: Unearthing Remnants of Humans in Archaeology and Anthropology." In *Archaeology and Anthropology: Past, Present and Future*, edited by D. Shankland, 197–218. ASA Monographs 48. London: Berg.
- Fontein, J. 2014. "Remaking the Dead, Uncertainty and the Torque of Human Materials in Northern Zimbabwe." In *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies*, edited by Finn Stepputat, 114–142. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Graham, Helen. 2004. "The Spanish Civil War, 1936–2003: 'The Return of Republican Memory'." *Science and Society* 68 (3): 313–328.
- Guyer, Sara. 2009. "Rwanda's Bones." *Boundary2* 36 (2): 155–175.
- Hertz, R. 1960. *Death and the Right Hand*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- HRW (Human Rights Watch), and A. Des Forges. 1999. *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Ingaalere, B. 2010. "The Ruler's Drum and the People's Shout: Accountability and Representation on Rwanda's Hills." In *Remaking Rwanda. State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence*, edited by S. Straus and L. Waldorf, 67–78. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Ingaalere, B. 2014. "What's on a Peasant's Mind? Experiencing RPF State Reach and Overreach in Post-genocide Rwanda (2000–10)." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8 (2): 214–230.
- Ingold, T. 2007. "Materials Against Materiality." *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (01): 1–16.
- Jahn, Ina, and Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon. Forthcoming. "Bones in the Wrong Soil: Reburial, Belonging and Disinterred Cosmologies in Post-conflict Northern Uganda." *Critical African Studies* 7 (2).
- Jessee, Erin. 2010. "Promoting Reconciliation Through Exhuming and Identifying Victims in the 1994 Genocide." *Policy Brief* (2). CIGI & Africa Initiative Policy Brief Series.
- Lemarchand, Rene. 2009. *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Mamdani, Mahmood. 2000. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- McLean Hilker, Lyndsay. 2012. "Rwanda's 'Hutsi': Intersections of Ethnicity and Violence in the Lives of Youth of 'Mixed' Heritage." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 19 (2): 229–247.
- Pottier, J. 2002. *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Last Twentieth Century*. African Studies Series (102). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prunier, G. 1995. *History of a Genocide: 1959–1994*. London: Hurst.
- Prunier, G. 2009. *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of Continental Catastrophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Renshaw, L. 2010. "The Scientific and Affective Identification of Republican Victims from the Spanish Civil War." *Journal of Material Culture* 15: 449–463.
- Renshaw, L. 2011. *Exhuming Loss: Memory, Materiality and Mass Graves of the Spanish Civil War*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Reyntjens, F. 1995. *Burundi: Breaking the Cycle of Violence*. London: Minority Rights Group.
- Reyntjens, F. 2006. "Post-1994 Politics in Rwanda: Problematizing 'Liberation' and 'Democratisation'." *Third World Quarterly* 27 (6): 1103–1117.
- Reyntjens, F. 2010. "Constructing the Truth, Dealing with Dissent, Domesticating the World: Governance in Post-genocide Rwanda." *African Affairs* 110 (438): 1–34.
- Robben, A. 2005. "Recovery and Reburial of the Past: Democracy, Accountability, and Impunity." Chap. 16 in *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rowlands, M. 1999. "Remembering to Forget: Sublimation as Sacrifice in War Memorials." In *The Art of Forgetting*, edited by A. Forty and S. Kuchler, 129–145. Oxford: Berg.
- Sant Cassia, P. 2005. *Bodies of Evidence: Burial, Memory and the Recovery of Missing Persons in Cyprus*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Straus, S., and L. Waldorf. 2011. "Introduction: Seeing Like a Post-conflict State." In *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence*, edited by S. Straus and L. Waldorf, 3–24. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Taylor, C. 1999. *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994*. Oxford: Berg.
- Thomson, S. 2011a. "The Darker Side of Transitional Justice: The Power Dynamics Behind Rwanda's Gacaca Courts." *Africa* 81 (3): 373–390.
- Thomson, S. 2011b. "Whispering Truth to Power: The Everyday Resistance of Rwandan Peasants to Post-genocide Reconciliation." *African Affairs* 110 (440): 439–456.
- Wagner, S. E. 2008. *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, Howard. 2004. "Death Warmed Up: The Agency of Bodies and Bones in Early Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites." *Journal of Material Culture* 9 (3): 263–291.