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## ***Disturbing Bodies: Perspectives on Forensic Anthropology***

Zoë Crossland and Rosemary Joyce,  
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### **Reviewed by Karen Gardner**

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*Disturbing Bodies*, edited by Zoë Crossland and Rosemary Joyce, is a reflective and reflexive exploration of the roles and responsibilities of anthropologists who work with the dead. This collection of papers, written by and for forensic anthropologists, forensic archaeologists, and bioarchaeologists, is unusual in that it does not deal with technical methods of excavation or osteological interpretation. Rather, it presents and interrogates the anthropological side of the work, introducing theoretical considerations such as the multivalent personhood of the decedent, the role of investigators as “truth makers,” the involvement of stakeholders and descendent communities, and the responsibility to represent and balance all of these components.

Several themes emerge and intertwine through these chapters. Differences in the practice of forensic anthropology and bioarchaeology are explored, including different modes of engagement, stakeholders, and methodologies. The responsibilities of researchers are considered, as well as the effects of the work on the researchers themselves. The ethics of engaging with the dead are discussed, including the opportunity to address past atrocities by providing evidence to correct politically skewed or revisionist histories.

The introductory chapter, by Crossland and Joyce, opens by addressing the relatively new field of forensic exhumation. The double meaning of the title, “Disturbing Bodies,” evokes both the effect of exhumation in disturbing the resting place of the dead, and the agency of exhumed bodies to disturb historical narratives or to affect the peace of mind of the living. The renewed presence of the dead among the living is fraught with a multitude of meanings for all stakeholders, including the practitioners themselves. The co-authors of this chapter invite discussion and exploration of these meanings.

The next two chapters reflect on the role of forensic archaeologists responding to state terrorism and political violence. Luis Fondebrider writes from his perspective as a member and co-founder of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (*Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense* or EAAF). Isaias Rojas-Perez writes about his experience working in postwar Peru. Both men address issues of community involvement in locating and exhuming remains, and stress that building relationships with the victims' loved ones is a key component of completing forensic investigations in South and Central America. This approach is contrasted with the removed focus on technical and scientific dimensions, typical in the U.S.A., Canada, the U.K., Europe, and Australia (although exceptions are noted for the World Trade Center identification project, and the work of JPAC-CIL, now DPAA). Of particular note is the importance of honoring local ways of knowing, and the hesitancy of many researchers to do so. Rojas-Perez laments, “The voice of the forensic expert cannot relate to the lay voice except in terms of either exclusion or subordination of the latter” (p. 52).

The fifth chapter, by Hugh Tuller, considers the responsibilities of forensic archaeologists, using an example from post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tuller outlines three simultaneous goals of forensic archaeologists: the *humanitarian*, identification and repatriation of victims' remains; the *legal*, collection of evidence for the prosecution of perpetrators; and the *historical*, the creation of an accurate historical record of events to counter politically skewed or revisionist histories (p. 86). Depending on the specific context and the funding agency, recovery efforts will inevitably favor one of these goals. The frustration of failing to meet the humanitarian goals of identification, even when legal and historical goals can be met, is also addressed poignantly in the earlier chapter by Rojas-Perez. Tuller suggests that forensic archaeologists should approach the excavation of forensic scenes using the full suite of archaeological skills, including analysis of site formation processes to glean evidence of human behavior before, during, and after the creation of a grave feature, to create and correct the historical narrative. "Archaeologists who are tasked to search for and excavate graves should recognize that they are working in a context that is usually much larger than their employer (politically, socially, and legally)" (p. 98).

Crossland and Joyce argue that forensic discourse has failed to provide space for individual practitioners to process the many ambiguities they encounter, including historical incongruities, differences of interpretation, and their own feelings about the work (p. 15). They suggest that these gaps are filled in two ways: by searching for greater control through standardized methodologies, and by using the outlet of fiction and autobiography to explore questions that are too subjective for professional reports. Tim Thompson deconstructs the goal of standardization in the fourth chapter of this volume. Thompson notes that while standardization is required for forensic evidence to be legally admissible, complexities arise when balancing this goal with the dynamic nature of scientific discovery, the need to work flexibly in variable fieldwork conditions, and concerns about privileging of the Western scientific paradigm as a way of knowing. In the sixth chapter, Zoë Crossland explores the ways that many forensic anthropologists, particularly those in the U.S., navigate these same tensions by writing fiction or autobiographies. These books often reify the "truth-making" power of the forensic anthropologist, through narratives of hidden

truths waiting to be found by a courageous and principled forensic expert (p. 117).

Chapters 7 and 8 explore issues involved when working with "race" and ancestry in forensic anthropology. Heather Walsh-Haney and Serrin Boys delve into the problem of correlating skeletal evidence of ancestry with socially-defined racial categories for the purpose of forensic identification. They note different terminological choices across missing persons' databases, and the fluidity of emic classification, as challenges. Pamela Geller addresses multiple forms of racially motivated violence in her chapter about collected crania from the Morton collection. Among the 16 crania she examined, all labeled "Seminole," two had features suggesting that they had African admixture. Her exploration of the identity of these two individuals traverses the violence of their deaths as victims of the Second Seminole War, through exhumation, collection, and display, and then the symbolic violence of Morton's cranial capacity studies. Having identified them as maroon Seminoles, with African admixture, there was no provision under NAGPRA to even repatriate them, as several of the Seminole Nations disenrolled their maroon members in the early twenty-first century. The echoed concerns through these two chapters reveal the porosity between bioarchaeology and forensic anthropology.

Debra Martin, as a bioarchaeologist, expands on these connections in Chapter 9. She begins the chapter by discussing her work at a massacre site in southwestern Colorado, dated to A.D. 1280, but quickly moves on to explore the many opportunities for bioarchaeological theory and practice to be informed by the techniques and insights of forensic anthropology and forensic archaeology. To build on the potential for these three fields to inform and enrich one another, she proposes "forensic bioarchaeology" as a blanket term to include all three subdisciplines. Martin is an advocate for four-field training for all who work in these fields, saying that the breadth of anthropology is the source of the discipline's strength in the study of violence, and "allows for a holistic examination of the dynamics that lead to the wide array of human atrocities committed throughout the world" (p. 165).

The final chapter in this volume was written by Rosemary Joyce, who returns to the unique position of forensic anthropologists and bioarchaeologists as

“the only academic group that routinely engages in disturbing bodies” (p. 170). This role comes with many responsibilities—to properly represent those whom we disturb, to respect the shifting realities of their presence and personhood, to honor their ongoing humanity (“human remains remain human,” p. 178), and to acknowledge the power of memory as a relationship between the living and the dead. She closes her comments with the following words, “We need to acknowledge that, at least in the world today, our intimate experience with the dead marks us. We are not everyday; we are uncanny, and we should ask what that does to us, and how we should act in light of it” (p. 184).

Despite the density of content packed into this slim volume, there are inevitably gaps. The discussion of commonality between forensic contexts glosses over some practical differences (e.g., the involvement of the public when responding to state violence vs. crime scene investigation). The basis for navigating inclusion and exclusion in recoveries could be further explored.

The porosity of time for descendent populations makes bioarchaeological contexts much more like forensic recoveries; these commonalities could be used to improve the method and practice of doing archaeology in post-colonial contexts. These additional topics underscore the contribution of this volume to inspire further thought about the interstitial spaces within forensic bioarchaeology.

Overall, this volume opens important conversations about the uncomfortable subjectivities within the ostensibly objective scientific practice of forensic anthropology, forensic archaeology, and bioarchaeology. The experience of working with victims of atrocities in the near or distant past offers similar opportunities to correct biased historical narratives, and to work with loved ones and descendent populations. The contributors to this volume advocate for an *anthropological* forensic anthropology. Exhumed human remains may become legal, cultural, and historical subjects, but they are simultaneously the locus of ongoing personhood, and have powerful relationships to the living.

