Bodies in Conflict: Corporeality, Materiality, and Transformation

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Bodies in Conflict: Corporeality, Materiality, and Transformation is a difficult work to absorb. It deals with shocking subjects—not only death and the effects of war on the human body, but rape, torture, genocide, the Holocaust, and the effects of war on both survivors and victims. The foreword uses the term "unsettling" to describe a quoted passage. *Bodies in Conflict* is indeed unsettling, but the book raises important issues that cannot be ignored in an increasingly troubled world.

Bodies in Conflict takes an interdisciplinary approach to modern (20th- and 21st-century) war, using archaeology, anthropology, history, military history, art history, and museum studies. This leads to the exploration of a wide range of topics, including archaeological excavations of battlefield graves, the repatriation of bodies, studies of trench art and its meaning to the soldiers who made it, the history of legislation attempting to limit damage inflicted by bullets on the human body, the care of disabled veterans (a topic that provides important lessons for today), and an examination of how badly wounded soldiers of World War I forced themselves to suffer in silence.

Several studies focus on repatriation efforts. Gabriel Moshenska describes efforts to recover and repatriate the remains of World War II airmen. Groups associated with air veterans know that such efforts are important to surviving comrades and families of lost airmen. Dominick Dendooven examines how repatriation was conducted by Great Britain and other European countries after World War I. The British policy against repatriation sometimes led to illegal exhumations. Michèle Barrett describes differences in the treatment of wartime graves based on race.

Several studies look at state-sanctioned killings. James Taylor and Helen Evans examine the Nazi concentration camps by studying articles of clothing. Stephanie Spars takes an innovative approach to graves of the "vanquished" from the Spanish Civil War—people killed by fascist militias—to determine the motives and loyalties of those responsible for burying the victims. Some of Spars's figures are difficult to read and should be clarified in futures studies of this type. Sarah Farman provides a compelling anthropological study of how Blackfeet Indian warriors use regalia to tell the story of their experiences and as a means of restoration. Although returning Blackfeet warriors suffered similar problems to those of other Vietnam veterans, Farman's chapter is a refreshing story of healing compared to many of the other chapters in the book.

A theme shared by many authors in this collection is how hatred affects behavior, and how it is harnessed through ideology and propaganda to rationalize genocide. Alfredo González-Ruibal notes that fascism used the body to explain the inferiority of the enemy (with terms such as "physically degenerate"),

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thus justifying atrocities. This outlook mimics that of premodern society, where one's own people are frequently called by a term that translates as "the true people," or simply "true humans." Outsiders are literally or figuratively named as someone who is not quite human, providing a ready excuse to validate atrocities committed against the "other."

Several of the essays in *Bodies in Conflict* share a perspective that might hinder a broader understanding of war—the idea that modern warfare differs from ancient or nonmodern war due to the increasing technological sophistication of modern conflicts: "[t]wentieth century war is a unique cultural phenomenon"; "[t]he First World War ... was the first war in which men were forced to expose their bodies to the new and deadly range of weaponry spawned by the second industrial revolution" (p. 4). This perspective is true only in the strictest sense, that modern technology has increased our ability to maim the human body and kill in massive numbers. The machete (or gladius) can be an equally deadly instrument of genocide. Ancient war often involved genocide, possibly as early as the 5th millennium B.C. destruction of Balkan agrarian villages. The conquests of Alexander and Rome and the Spanish subjugation of Tenochtitlan involved widespread slaughter and represent the norm of warfare rather than the exception. While modern technology has increased the efficiency of killing, it does not automatically equate to an increase in deaths. During the conquest of Gaul, Rome may have killed more people within modern France, in absolute numbers, than Germany did in the trenches of World War I (Victor Hanson, *Carnage and Culture*, Anchor Books, New York, NY, 2002, p. 100). Of greater importance are the common patterns between ancient and modern wars, and particularly a focus on the factors that cause conventional war to devolve into genocide.

Only in recent centuries have we attempted to moderate the effects of war by codifying its conduct to limit casualties. While genocide is morally unacceptable in the modern world, we frequently appear to be unable or unwilling to stop it until it has reached catastrophic proportions. A serious concern about modern conflict is the increasing frequency of atrocities, targeting civilians, and instances of ethnic cleansing similar to the patterns of premodern warfare. Although the 20th century saw the development of increasingly horrific means of killing, our ability to destroy the planet has placed constraints on large-scale warfare. The use of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons has, with important exceptions, been avoided since World War I. Whole populations, however, have been slaughtered in low technology conflicts such as Cambodia, Rwanda, and Bosnia. While *Bodies in Conflict* was not intended as a comprehensive study of the causes of war, perusal of the topics covered by the collection cannot help but raise the issue. This interesting collection points out the need for archaeologists who study war to focus closely on the causes of genocide, on the patterns that might help to predict its onset, and what can be done to prevent it.

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