Identities and Identifications

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Abstract. The present paper tackles the issue of scientifically reconstructing past identities from remains of bodies by putting together the pieces and developing them into narratives of a unified entity. It is the area explored by forensics and the experts specialized in the field- anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists, pathologists or geneticists – in detective/crime fiction, thus demonstrating how justice can be done by using an interdisciplinary approach.

Key words: identity, forensic sciences, identification technique, research, body, storyline

One's personal identity covers all the individual features that make one unique and it is seen as being entitled to track "these features through time" (Behrensen, 2017:4) in the intricate process of establishing that relation in which "everything bears to itself and no other things"(9), in order for an identity to be recognized in its entirety. The singularity of an identity resides in the body, on the one hand, and on the other hand, in the individual's mind, in memories, coherently rendered as past events, as well as in other factors that shape and provide one's particularity, such as society, place, especially home, culture or ethnicity, that is, all the interplaying components that make people be different from one another. When it comes to forensic identification of a body, identity is conceptualized in terms of the characteristics of trace material found at crime scenes when examiners focus on all the skeletal pieces, or fragments of human tissues, that is, all the traces left by humans, and try to estimate the relevance of the material details recovered after the fatal event. Scientifically reconstructing bodies from pieces of puzzles implies combining various methods in order to correctly assess all the particular, unique marks isolated from human remains or other samples so that a final identification should be possible, as well as a a list of possible causes of the person's death (see Grévin et al., 1998: 2-3).

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Reconstructing damaged identities

A medical forensic examiner is commonly one of the leading characters in a crime fiction, as this particular stage of investigating the victim/survivor – offender/criminal relationship is decisive in establishing identities and the facts that generated the tragic end, be them accidents or voluntary bodily destruction through crime and suicide; in many cases, this process reveals the deceased's identity in terms of their biological organism their personal distinctivenes and uniqueness, and also aspects of the their individual life experiences, so that a whole life story can be mapped. It is a multi-sided, complex work carried out by specialized teams of forensic anthropologists, those who, as Dr Temperance Brennan acknowledges, "work with the recently dead (...). Drawing on our knowledge of biomechanics, genetics, and skeletal anatomy, we address questions of identification, cause of death, postmortem interval, and postmortem alteration of the corpse. We examine the burned, decomposed, mummified, mutilated, dismembered, and skeletal"(Reichs, 2008: 4).

Forensic identification of the remains of a body includes several important stages, starting with a detailed analysys of the trace material found at a crime scene, specially on fragments of human tissues, in case of which the following steps are to be taken, according to the standard procedures of the modical examination operation: demonstration that these tissue fragments belong to the human species, then if these tissue fragments belong to a single person, continuing with the age, gender, height, race, dental status and traumatic injuries and/or associated pathologies of the victim, respectively, differentiation of traumatic injuries prior to death from postmortem, non-traumatic ones or postmortem cadaveric changes, to end with the probable date of death (see Roşu, 2011: 413- 26). These are the estimated methods employed by the same expert, Dr Temperance Brennan, when working on the identification of some unknown, fragmentary, decomposed remains recovered from a crime scene, that is,

> I took the cranium in my hands, palate and foramen magnum pointing up (...); it looks like the third mollars were just erupting, and there's minimal wear of the others. The basal suture has recently fused (...). The configuration suggests and age in the mid to late teens (...). The mastoids are small. And (...) this raised ridge dies out at the end of the cheekbone (...). These features all suggest female (...). What about race? Tough one. The nasal opening isn't all that wide, but the nasal bones meet low on the bridge (...). The lower face projects forward (...). Cranial shape is long, but not excessively narrow (...); my gut feeling is Negroid : African-American. Or African. Caribbean. South American, Central- (...). A black teenaged girl (Reichs, 2008: 40-1).

Reading corpses via forensic sciences such as anthropology or archaeology, represents the very foundations for any mechanism of personal identification

in an investigation that is meant to retrieve, recompose and rebuild biographical moments of damaged bodies from mere pieces of puzzles in the course of the preliminary research of each individual case from historical and legal perspectives, as Dr Kay Scarpetta proceeds to do when examining John Doe (the placeholder names given to the corpse in the coroner's office prior to establishing any formal identity), with a PERK, a physical evidence recovery kit, that includes "swabbing orifices, clipping fingernails and plucking head, body and pubic hair" (Cornwell, 2000: 137); it is the stage of identifying the given condition of the recovered remains collected during the background research and submitted to the laboratory analysis in order to have the victim's particular marks properly assessed so that valid conclusions should be reached, in the way this pathologist does while minutely examining the dead man's body:

> During my violation of this man's most private places I discover healing tears of his anal ring. He has abrasions at the angles of his mouth. Fibers adhere to his tongue and the inside of his cheeks. I go over every inch of him with a lens and the story he tells grows more suspicious. His elbows and knees are slightly abraded and covered with dirt and fibres (...). Over the bony prominences of both wrists are incomplete circumferential dry reddish-brown abrasions and minute skin tags. I draw blood from the iliac veins and vitreous fluid from the eyes, and test tubes ride up on the dumbwaiter to the third-floor toxicology lab for STAT alcohol and carbon monoxide tests"(Cornwell, 2000: 137).

Carrying out laboratory research of the analyzed material - anthropological, odontological, radiological, pathological, or genetic - is an essential requirement for mapping the identity structure, both internal and external, that could lead to discover the victims' life experiences, their inner operating system, feelings, presence and outcomes, and to elaborate the expertise report that could fill in the missing parts of their past, as a result of the accurate process of linking findings together, an intricate operation as, Dr Brennan states it, "The human remains meant time for research"(Reichs, 2008: 80).

Bodies as texts

Forensic experts consider that the biological individualization of a person represents the very objective of the identification process, carried out gradually through the analysis of morphological, physiological, biochemical and behavioral characteristics (see Beliş, 1999: 31). When the identification is made on bone materials, the establishment of the individual belonging of the bones will be followed, as demonstrated by the minute examination of the deceased's skeletal evidence:

> The two leg bones were similar in side and robusticity. Both were slender and lacked prominent muscle attachment sites. One was a left, the other a

> right. Both were straight, with little shaft concavity, an AFRICAN-American more that a European trait. And with the skull, I [Dr. Brennan] took measurements. Maximum length. Bicondylan breadth. Midshaft circumference (...). Both bones classified as female. Both classified as black (...) after examining the cranium and the femora The picture suggested death sometime in the late teens. The leg bones came fom a young black female. So did the skull" (Reichs, 2008: 80-1).

In forensic anthropology, major steps are acknowledged to be the identification of the age, sex, race and stature of the victim and then bring them together, combine them and unify them in order to get that jigsaw storyline that could reveal the destroyed self in a rather complex contruction, namely, as Dr Rosie Fergusson puts it, that by "dissecting cadavers to find out what had taken place before death (...); and thus the whole process became an absorbing insight into the vagaries of life and death" (Gray, 2015: 97). It is a complex procedure of "manufacturing identities" by restoring both their physical body and moral personality (see Hossu, 2012: 99) in an identity narrative, able to shape and map a life story described as being a combined structure of internal and external elements that contribute to one's sense of self. It is what forensic practitioners, such as Kay Scarpetta, do when trying to read a John Doe's fragmentary, burned remains recovered from a crime scene:

> A syringe is still embedded in the crook of his right arm, and second-degree burns blister his upper right arm. They have bright red margins, and his skin is streaked black with soot that is thick inside his nose and mouth. He is telling me that he was alive when the fire started. He had to be breathing to inhale smoke. He had to have a blood pressure for fluid to be pumped into his burns, causing them to blister and have a bright red margin. The circumstances of a set fire and the needle in his arm certainly could suggest suicide (Cornwell, 2000: 133).

An essential conclusion related to establishing victims' identities when examining their cadaver remains is reached after the odontological report, consisting of "the comparison of antemortem dental information regarding a missing person with postmortem data from an unidentified corpse or human remains" (De Angelis, Cattaneo, 2015: 505), an essential stage in the objectification course that such an evaluation takes, as stated by Kay Scarpetta when investigating her case of John Doe:

> Teeth have their own stories. Your dental habits often reveal more about you that jewelry or designer clothes and can identify you to the exclusion of all theirs, providing you have premortem records for comparison. Teeth tell me about your hygiene. They whisper secrets about drug abuse, early childhood antibiotics, disease, injury and how important your appearance was to you. They confess if your dentist was a crook and billed your insurance company

> for work that was never done. They tell me, for that matter, if your dentist was competent" (Cornwell, 2000: 310).

Once identities have been determined, the forensic experts resort to use the body of evidence in order to obtain the victims' antemortem details that could help in restoring the closing moments of their corporeality, as seen with Kim Luong, who, the examinations point out, was alive when the perpetrator began beating and biting her as "there was sufficient tissue response to the injuries of her face to suggest she was alive when he began beating her. What we can't know is whether she was conscious or how long she was conscious"(179); or with Diane Bray, whose body displays a whole narrative of assault and aggression as

> Clotting suggests a survival time of at least six minutes from the time the injury was inflicted (...). The crushed facial bones (...); the splits and tears to skin made by some sort of tool that left a pattern of round and linear wounds (...), chipping hammer (...). Premeditation (...). He brought his weapon to the scenes versus using something he found when he got there (...); the photo here shows knuckle bruises from punching. So he also used his fists to beat her (...) with bare hands based on the fact that the fibers [of the sweater] are torn instead of cut (186-7).

Reading bodies with the aim of identifying one's once unified self for the sake of justice and of bringing closure and solace to the surviving relatives and friends, is that invisible contribution of the crime detection technique that can help with rewriting, even engineering, identity tales from remnants left at crime scenes, carefully analyzed and estimated for each particular case by a compact group of scientists whose work so crucially contributes to the recording and completing each victim's life account.

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