

Mass graves and exhumations in Slovenia: Agency of the dead, their remains and the materiality of mass graves

Jaka Repič, University of Ljubljana, ORCID: 0000-0003-2009-4369

Abstract

There are several hundred mass graves in Slovenia, most of which are remnants of the Second World War and its aftermath, particularly the extrajudicial mass executions that took place after the war. The article explores anthropological perspectives on the issue of mass graves, focusing on how individuals in different contexts, especially those involved in mass grave research and exhumations, experience the dead, their remains, and the materiality and spatiality of mass graves. Specifically, the article discusses how the agency of the dead can be understood in the contexts of mass graves research as well as how exhumations influence individuals, social actions and transformations of the social status of the dead. It employs the concept of relational or distributed agency that operates across the network of actors (relatives, locals, people involved in research, exhumation, and commemoration), places of mass graves and the materiality of human remains. When mass graves are exhumed, human remains are transformed from inert objects into relevant actors in social and political life with the capacity to affect the individuals and catalyze social processes.

KEYWORDS: Slovenia; mass graves, exhumation, agency, human remains

Introduction: Encounters with the dead in mass graves

One morning in the fall of 2024, I drove to a small village south of the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana, to observe the exhumation of a small, unmarked mass grave that was believed to contain the remains of three dead people. When I arrived at the location, shared by one of the interlocutors, an archaeologist who led the research and exhumation, I parked my car by the road and walked to the presumed location of the hidden grave in the forest. Not far from the road, a group of people had gathered, and the work

had already begun. There I met with a group of archaeologists assigned with the exhumation, an official of the Ministry of Defense who was involved in securing permits and funds for the exhumation, a local person operating a small excavator, a physical anthropologist, and a couple of relatives of one of the people who died in 1945—almost 80 years ago—and was presumably buried in this mass grave.

After a half a day of work clearing the site, digging the dirt, clearing the roots and rocks, and carefully examining all the excavated material by hand, visually and with a metal detector, the pit finally revealed the first human remains as well as some clothing material and a few bullets. To my view, the pit was like any other place in the forest, but the “skilled vision” (see the term in Grasseni, 2009) of the archaeologists not only proved it to be a correct location but also revealed the basic circumstances of the disposal of the bodies. With each find, there was an eerie sense of excitement. The first bones proved that the site was the right one. The deeper they dug, the more bones were uncovered and carefully cleared. This led to discussing how the persons in this unmarked grave died, what kind of objects are usually discovered, and which are decomposed, how bones decompose in some environments and remain intact for decades in others. They discussed the materiality and position of the remains as well as their surroundings. The arrangement of the bones, any marks, their placement in the grave, accompanying objects, the state of decomposition of the body and its intertwining with tree roots and rocks—everything was turned into relevant knowledge and compared to their previous experiences. Other exhumation sites were mentioned and their knowledge, experience and expertise were shared.

Figure 1

Archaeological excavation of mass grave. Photo by Repič, 2024.



Figure 2

Objects found in mass grave. Photo by Repič, 2024.



The conversation also touched on the politics of exhumation, especially what to do with the bones, how to bury them or store them in an ossuary, the possibilities of further research and especially the possibility of identifying the victims, etc. While most of the professionals I spoke with were inclined to remain within their roles as researchers, they inevitably become entangled in the broader processes by which human remains, objects, and silenced memories are unearthed, and the exhumed bodies are symbolically reconstituted as dead persons and (re)integrated into contemporary society. (Jugo, Wastell, 2015; Rubin, 2020).

The observation of this excavation of a mass grave and exhumation was part of the ongoing research projects,¹ in which my part of the research focuses on mass graves in Slovenia and the changing role and agency of the dead as the mass graves are docu-

¹ Funded by the European Union (ERC project DEAGENCY, No. 101095729). Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

The research was also part of the research project *The Weight of the past. Heritage of the Multicultural Area: Case Study of Gottschee* (J6-4612) and the research program *Ethnological Research of Cultural Knowledge, Practices, and Forms of Socialities* (P6-0187), cofinanced by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency from the national budget.

mented and researched, and human remains are uncovered, exhumed, occasionally identified and stored or reburied.

The ethnographic vignette above is an example of the multiplicity of different and diverse contexts in which people encounter the dead, the materiality of human remains, and the spatiality of mass grave sites. In addition to the professional engagement with mass graves, there are many other contexts of such encounters. Some search for their deceased relatives. Some visit the sites of mass graves or memorials or attend commemorative events. Others participate in the politics of memory and difficult heritage. Some are involved because they live near the sites of mass graves. There are even artists who explore the topic of violence, mass executions, mass graves, etc.

This article examines mass graves through the lens of social and cultural anthropology, with a particular focus on encounters with the dead and the capacity of the dead to affect the living. It examines how individuals involved in the research and exhumation of mass graves, as well as in commemorative or even aestheticizing practices, encounter, experience, and relate to the dead, human remains, and the material, spatial, and affective dimensions of mass graves. The broader aim is to explore how the dead in mass graves, especially when their remains and memories are unearthed, affect individuals, act within and shape their social worlds, and influence contemporary societies.

Methodology, theoretical framework and ethical implications of anthropological research of the dead in mass graves

Although the primary aim of this article is to examine the agency of the dead in mass graves, the discussion also engages with the broader issues surrounding mass graves: a) the changing role of the dead in contemporary society as mass graves are uncovered, human remains are exhumed and the findings are presented and discussed in public; b) the affective power of the spatiality and materiality of human remains and grave sites, and c) the agency of the dead and their sociality in terms of their reintegration into the society.

The ethnographic research has been carried out since early 2024 in Slovenia and among the Slovenes in Argentina, mainly through unstructured and semi-structured interviews with selected research participants pursuing the above questions. The research also included observations of commemorations, of people visiting mass graves, and some exhumations. Most of the research participants mentioned in this article are experts with professional experiences in the excavation of mass graves, exhumation, and identification of victims. The selection of interlocutors primarily included active researchers in-

volved in investigating and exhuming mass graves from the Second World War in Slovenia. Other interlocutors in the research were individuals with significant personal connection to mass graves—whether through involvement in memory politics, their proximity to mass graves sites, or their familial ties to the victims. The sampling was based on two primary contexts. The first focused on actors in national and local memory politics. The second involved members of the Slovene diaspora in Argentina, where the author has done his previous research, and where narratives of the Second World War mass graves play a central role in identity and political stance. A snowball sampling method was used to reach individuals with personal and familial connections with the dead in the mass graves.² Interviews were either recorded or notes were taken where recording was not possible or allowed due to the sensitivity or difficulty of the topic for some research participants.³ Ethical implications of the research as well as the author's positionality have been taken in consideration in all phases of the research, analysis and publication of the results.

Mass Graves: Perspectives of Social and Cultural Anthropology

Mass graves are usually the result of mass violence and the hidden or public mass disposal of human bodies. In some cases, such as during epidemics or wars, sanitary mass graves may also be used to prevent the spread of disease. Erin Jessee and Mark Skinner write that a mass grave can be a burial site for two or more people, who did not receive “a culturally appropriate burial and a grave” (2005, p. 56). Thus, mass graves are not only places with corpses or human remains but also sites of physical and symbolic desecration and dehumanization of the victims. When talking about the victims in mass graves in Slovenia an interlocutor emphasized:

They [the victims] are erased. Their status is very odd, not only for those (dead) in Slovenia. Also elsewhere, for example in Argentina, there are people who do not exist anymore, *desaparecidos*. There is a term used, *ninguñar*, which means that effectively you are erased. They deny your very existence. (Interlocutor-JR010, 5.12.2024).

² At the time of writing the article, the ethnographic research with the relatives, the locals in the vicinity of the mass graves and those involved in the memory politics was still taking place. However, this article is mainly based on the ethnography among the researchers of the mass graves and among the Slovenes in Argentina.

³ The recordings, when allowed, were transcribed and pseudonymized. Transcriptions will later be available in the open access form in the Social Science Data Archives (ADP, <https://www.adp.fdv.uni-lj.si>). All the interlocutors gave an informed consent, but some did not allow recording of the interview, only note-taking. In the text, the excerpts of the interviews are marked with pseudonyms.

Although mass graves have not been uncommon throughout history, they have become more prevalent in the last century. As Élisabeth Anstett (2018) notes, mass graves are both numerous and widespread across the globe, particularly a legacy of the wars and violence of the 20th and 21st centuries due to the previously unheard-of possibilities of industrial or mass killing, made possible on the one hand by the development of military technology, and by political dictatorships on the other. There are many examples of genocides, extrajudicial mass executions and mass graves in Europe and elsewhere. To name just a few: the Armenian genocide of 1915 (see Kévorkian, 2014), the Holocaust during the Second World War, the mass killings during the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939 (e.g. Ferrándiz, 2013, 2015; Renshaw, 2016; Rubin, 2020). There are mass graves from the Second World War and its aftermath in many countries (including Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, etc.). In the 1990s, we witnessed the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which resulted in many mass graves, particularly known the one in Srebrenica (e.g. Wagner, 2008), but also a genocide in Rwanda, which left the country's landscape scattered with mass graves (Korman, 2014). There have been other genocides and mass murders, for example in the colonial and postcolonial Africa (Herero in Namibia, modern genocide in Darfur, etc.), the genocide in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 (see Guillou, 2012; Jarvis, 2015), and the mass killings in Indonesia, East Timor, West Papua, Sri Lanka, etc. Latin America is no exception. Disappearances, mass killings and mass graves have also occurred in Latin America, for example in Argentina (see Feitlowitz, 1998; Robben, 2000, 2005; Crossland, 2000; Ranalletti, 2014), Uruguay (see Lopez-Mazz, 2015), Guatemala (Duterte, 2016), Peru, Colombia (Losonczy, 2016), Mexico, and elsewhere.

Due to the wide variety of mass graves, Jessee and Skinner (2005, p. 57–58) proposed a typology of mass graves as burial sites and burial-related sites, which additionally includes research on the killings, exhumation, forensic identification, and heritage production. Mass graves can be a) sites of killing and disposal of human bodies on the surface (see examples from Cambodia in Guillou, 2012); b) killing sites in natural caves, mine shafts (e.g. postwar graves in Slovenia, see Ferenc, 2005; Košir, Rozman, 2025), sinkholes, or graves dug for the purpose of mass executions (e.g. Holocaust caves in Belarus, see Straede, 2015). They can be permanent or temporary burial sites—in the latter case, the graves are excavated for reburial or delayed disposal of human remains. In addition, mass graves can be either places where executions took place or places where the bodies of people killed elsewhere were dumped or buried. The primary burial sites are typically sites of killing and immediate disposal of bodies, while in the secondary / tertiary sites with reburied human remains, the corpses are usually decomposed, mixed with soil,

and often crushed using heavy machinery (see examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Jugo, Wastell, 2015). The possibilities and practices of research, exhumation and identification depend on these circumstances. “[T]he remains of the victims of mass violence have, in the vast majority of cases (including the Holocaust), been deposited directly into the ground by their killers or by accomplices of the latter” (Anstett, 2018, p. 178). The size of mass graves also varies – some sites contain two or a few bodies, while others may contain hundreds or even thousands of bodies, for example in mine shafts or natural caves or crevices (e.g. several such large mass graves have been discovered in Slovenia).

The search for the victims in mass graves, carried out by their relatives, governmental agencies or nongovernmental and international organizations, often led to systematic research, exhumations, and the rise of forensic analysis aimed to identify victims (see Rosenblatt, 2015). The so-called “forensic turn” (Anstett, Dreyfus, 2015a) complemented historical research with archaeological exhumations, anthropological and forensic investigations, and the identification of human remains. Such interdisciplinary research and knowledge have had grave societal implications, especially for the politics of memory and the ways in which individuals, societies, and states have revisited their pasts and committed to unearthing their dead, organizing their burials and reshaping collective memories (Anstett, 2018, p. 179; cf. Ferrándiz, 2013). For example, Katherine Verdery (1999) shows how dead bodies, especially those of the famous figures, leaders, national heroes, and martyrs, have been politically used in post-socialist Eastern Europe. Similarly, Francisco Ferrándiz (2022) shows the connection between the burial, exhumation, and reburial of the dead from the Spanish Civil War and Franco's regime with the re-interpretation of national history and the changing ideological and political framework in contemporary Spain. Their movement, reburial, and public display have the capacity to manipulate and rewrite histories, assert national identities and appropriate political power. The dead are not merely symbols, but agents with social lives that extend beyond their death and continue in rituals and commemorations.

Some other studies explicitly addressed the question of the agency of the dead in mass graves, their posthumous lives and their transformed roles in the society (e.g., Verdery, 1999; Wagner, 2008; Crossland, 2017; Rubin, 2020). Focusing on the agency of the dead helps to examine if and how the dead influence individuals and catalyze processes of social change. Such an approach is based on Alfred Gell's conceptualization of agency not only as a property of the living, but also as a property or capacity of material objects (1998). Gell originally developed this model of agency to demonstrate the agentive ca-

pacities of art. Works of art or 'art objects' possess agency and operate within a network of social relations (Gell, 1998, p. 5). Similarly, Maruška Svašek shows the efficacy of art objects (artifacts) as their capacity to engage the individuals, evoke emotional responses and generate social actions (2007, p. 75).

This model has been used in several studies analyzing the agency of dead bodies, for example in mortuary and political rituals or in public displays (e.g. Harper, 2010). Dead bodies can be ascribed different meanings and values by different people and have the "capacity to evoke a variety of understandings" (Verdery, 1999, p. 29; cf. Hallam, Hockey, Howarth, 1999). In this sense, human remains are not merely material objects used by the living (in research, mourning, commemoration, etc.) to exert or justify their own actions. In his research on early Anglo-Saxon cremation rites, Howard Williams asserts that it is the "corporeal presence of the dead [that] provides an agency to affect the experience and actions of mourners and evoke memories" (2004, p. 265). He continues that

the physicality and materiality of dead bodies, associated artifacts, structures and places can be seen as extensions of deceased's personhood actively affecting the remembrance of the deceased by the living and structuring future social action (Williams, 2004, p. 266).

These examples demonstrate a variety of possibilities to examine the affective and agentive properties of places of burials and the materiality of human remains. However, the agency or capacity to affect and act does not come directly from the body as a "secondary agents" (cf. Gell, 1998, p. 36–38). The agentive properties of the dead are manifested in the entanglement of human and nonhuman actors. The analysis in this article employs the concept of distributed agency developed by N. J. Enfield and Paul Kockelman (2017). They understand distributed agency as relational, operating across a network of actors, places, materials, and objects (see Enfield, 2017). This approach is less concerned with who has agency than with the cultural conditions under which agency is contested, negotiated, and distributed. Zoë Crosland similarly suggests that "to fully engage with the ability of the dead to intervene in the lives of the living needs a theory of agency that is fundamentally relational" (2017, p. 188). She explored the agency of human remains as understood in forensic anthropology observing how the agentive properties of the exhumed dead—bones, clothing, artifacts, the materiality of mass graves, memorials, etc.—affect the living and intervene in their lives and social worlds (cf. Crossland, 2017).

Mass graves in Slovenia: Historical context, research and the struggle for memory

Slovenia is one of the many countries in Europe and the world where a large number of hidden mass graves have been uncovered in recent decades. Currently, over 700 potential mass grave sites have been registered, many (but far from all) of which have been well documented and intensively researched from the perspectives of history, archaeology, physical anthropology, criminology, heritage studies, speleology, and other disciplines. So far over 220 mass graves have been documented; 91 of these have been completely exhumed and 31 partially exhumed (amounting to over 9000 confirmed and exhumed victims). Human remains have been confirmed in more than a hundred additional mass graves, but exhumations have not yet taken place.

Most of the hidden mass graves in Slovenia are a direct result of wars and mass violence. Most of them date back to the Second World War. Most of the victims in these mass graves were soldiers: mainly soldiers of the German armies, but also soldiers of various other military factions, such as Croatian and Slovenian militias collaborating with the Nazi regime. However, civilians and political opponents of the communist regime established in Yugoslavia at the end of the war were also victims of extrajudicial mass killings and were disposed of along with the soldiers. In western Istria in the Western Slovenia and neighboring Croatia, as well as around Trieste in Italy, many Italians were killed and dumped in the karstic pits (*foibe*) by the Yugoslav communist troops during and at the end of the war (see Zamparutti, 2015). Mass graves already appeared during the Second World War, but most of them date to the weeks after the war officially ended, in May and June 1945. When the war ended, thousands of people retreated north to Austria. Many escaped, but thousands were captured, imprisoned, and killed. In addition, about 10,000 Slovene Home Guard soldiers who collaborated with the German army were returned from the refugee camp in Austria run by the British Army and executed by special forces of the Yugoslav regime (cf. Corselis, 1997, p. 131). It is estimated that approximately 15,000 Slovenes and about 85,000 others were killed and buried in such mass graves (Dežman, 2019).

My previous encounters with the issue of mass graves in Slovenia date back to my PhD research in the Slovenian diaspora in Argentina, in which social memories of the Second World War, exile from the homeland, and mass graves from the war and post-war period form the essential historical, moral and political-ideological standpoints of their existence and persistence in the diaspora (see Repič, 2006, 2016). One of the interlocutors referred to post-war Slovenian emigration to Argentina and summarized: "There are hard-

ly any families here that don't have relatives who ended up in mass graves." (InterlocutorJR022, April 2025).

In the diaspora, social memories of the homeland and their migration experience were connected to Yugoslavia and the communist revolution during the Second World War. Their anti-communist struggle and memories of mass executions were carefully integrated in community's political rituals, ceremonies and commemorations (see Repič, 2014). Political rituals, such as the Commemorations of the Victims of Communist Violence in Yugoslavia that has been taking place annually in Argentina since 1948 (see Rant, 1998; Repič, 2019), not only reinforced the social memories of exile, but also catalyzed social organization of the diaspora, its political ideology, and the framework of its attitudes towards the homeland and its past. In this sense mass graves as material remnants of war and post-war killings have formed essential parts of rituals that have enabled articulation of narratives and standardization of interpretations and social memories both for the individuals and for the community.

Accounts of the executions were meticulously documented, publicized and discussed in the diaspora by the occasional survivors, as well as by some local witnesses (e.g. Kocmur, 1965–1971; Kovač, 1968; Kozina, 1970, 1990; Zajec, Kozina, Dejak, 1998; cf. Švent, 2007, p. 64). In Slovenia, however, the situation was completely reversed. The issue of executions and mass graves was largely secluded, with any public disclosure being silenced and reprimanded. "[The] burial sites were deliberately and carefully concealed for decades" (Ferenc, 2012, p. 7). Some interlocutors explained that knowledge of executions was often silenced even within families:

People had different family experiences and possibilities of talking about that. I also know that my husband's family, who also had their own history and experiences during the war, didn't talk about it with their children. This silence is passed on, or obviously there was no space to talk about such matters.

The milestone may indeed have been independence, but also the opening up of society, where these issues were then discussed much more widely. (InterlocutorJR010, 5.12.2024).

One interlocutor told me that until the 1990s he didn't know the details of his grandfather's execution because of his presumed connections to the Germans, simply because he remained employed at one of the mines that continued to operate during the war. He also wasn't aware of any mass graves:

It was a terrible shock for me when I found out about this, and when I asked my father ..., he said that of course we knew about it, but we didn't talk about it. So, even as a local who lived there, a local of the younger generation, you couldn't know. (InterlocutorJR026, 28. 7. 2025).

An interlocutor who is well familiar with the situation in Slovenia and among the Slovenians in Argentina emphasized how this difference influenced the attitude towards the dead:

This experience of exile, the reason for leaving, is also something that is transmitted. There is a space where you can talk about those who are not there, not necessarily about graves, but about the dead. (InterlocutorJR010, 5.12.2024).

It was only in the mid-1970s and early 1980s that the issue began to appear tentatively in some publications (initially published abroad and banned in Yugoslavia). Despite the official silence, knowledge of mass executions and mass graves persisted among the relatives of the victims and among the local population, who knew of mass graves in their vicinity. Until the late 1980s, however, the subject was kept strictly in the private sphere. Several interlocutors emphasized the lingering fear and a sense of social exclusion they still feel after decades of silence imposed on them or their families. One interlocutor told me how the memory of mass executions was kept in the family:

Every Sunday family meal ended in the same way, with tears. Nobody wanted to bring up this topic for the conversation, but my grandmother always remembered how her brothers were taken and killed. So, my father took it upon himself to find his uncles. (InterlocutorJR005, 4.9.2024).

Mass graves only became a public issue with the democratization process in the late 1980s and the ensuing independence from Yugoslavia in June 1991. Since then, investigations of mass graves have been carried out, mostly under the auspices of the Government Commission for the Resolution of Issues Relating to Hidden Mass Graves. Initially, the work involved collecting data on mass grave sites and victims, as well as organizing exhumations of human remains and their reburial. The commission's work includes registering potential mass grave sites based on historical records and oral testimonies. The final phase is archaeological excavation, exhumation, and reburial of human remains in marked graves or ossuaries (cf. Ferenc, 2012, p. 5). Although identification of the victims and human remains is only occasionally done, one of the underlying aims of the various actors involved in research and exhumation is to provide a culturally appropriate burial

for the dead. “The basic human right—to have a grave—was denied” (Ferenc, 2012, p. 7).

I think that funerals are important, but not only for the dead. No, I think they serve the community, to bring people together, help them come to terms with these events and move on. I think that it is important for society, for health, for basic needs. (InterlocutorJR005, 4.9.2024).

Exhumations as encounters with the dead

The issue of mass graves involves a wide range of actors, including not only the living, but also the dead, whose remains, when exhumed, can exert a profound impact on individuals and societies. In what follows, the article focuses on encounters with the dead and mass graves in the context of exhumations, elaborating on how one can understand the role of the dead in these encounters, the agentive properties of the materiality of mass graves and human remains, and how these encounters engender a transformation of the social status of the dead in society.

The interlocutors I refer to below have been involved in the research and excavation of mass graves as archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and geographers, relatives of the deceased or for other reasons. The researchers were inclined to emphasize how encounters with human remains and mass graves were an ordinary part of their job. They described the encounters as connected to the professional work of investigation, which includes excavating remains, cleaning them, sorting them for possible later identification and storing them for reburial. The excavation of World War II mass graves is basically the same as any archaeological excavation: “Methodology is the same. We search where the grave is, clear the site, document, excavate everything and prepare everything relevant for anthropological analysis.” (InterlocutorJR027, 30.7.2025). Another interlocutor shared this view:

I work in the same way as with archaeological [graves]. Well, the same, only I can't examine so many things because there's not enough time. Let's say, tooth wear. I am eliminating all pathology, we are eliminating all dental bridges, let's say if someone... Because this is also an indicator. In Macesnova gorica there is a lot of dental prosthetics, dental bridges, silver metal, that thing, I don't know what it is, because no one could tell me, like stainless steel, gold, also artificial porcelain made of white mass, no, not porcelain, but something else. There are also quite a few tooth fillings, and that in itself indicates a higher social status.

These were not poor peasants with rotten teeth, but well-situated people who could afford (dental care).

We have internationally standardized methods that can be used for every case... For example, sex is determined by descriptive sexual characteristics, which means we have, let's say, what I'm going to say, shape. Basically, the only bone that most clearly distinguishes between males and females is the shape of the pelvis, right, there's nothing else, and there we have a five-point scale, and you mark each sexual characteristic with five numbers. For example, in archaeological examinations, I examine 41 sexual characteristics on the skeleton. Here [in mass graves], that's not possible. (InterlocutorJR004, 28.8.2024).

Photo 3

In situ examination of human remains in a small mass grave. Photo by Repič, 2024.



While the researchers tend to remain within the confines of their professional work and archaeological and anthropological methodology, their engagement with the mass graves falls within broader socio-political contexts. Some of the researchers also mentioned that being involved in the excavation of recent mass graves is also relevant for them, especially when the relatives of the deceased are involved:

I look at it this way: What can we do for someone by digging them up and re-burying them in the cemetery? Those who are alive, who are very close relatives, they still appreciate this. (InterlocutorJR008, 9.10.2024).

They [the relatives] must be able to mourn. All those whose relatives, parents, ended up, I don't know, in Kočevski rog. I find it such an interesting social phenomenon, don't you? That things like execution sites are so important to the lives of some people, right? (InterlocutorJR003, 23.8.2024).

But then you see the relatives, old people in their 80s, thanking you, and saying that now they will sleep peacefully. Because they didn't get them [the deceased] for 80 years. For 70, 75 years they were in, how should I put it, mental distress. (InterlocutorJR012, 18.2.2025).

The exhumations are embedded in a network of different actors: the government commission, state agencies, non-governmental organizations, local and commemorative associations, as well as relatives of the dead. This contrasts with other archaeological excavations, as the exhumation of mass graves from the Second World War brings about a change in the relationship with the dead. When the dead are exhumed, they affect society and also take on new roles.

Materiality and agency of mass graves and human remains

Most of the interlocutors involved in research of mass graves emphasized their encounters with the dead through the material aspects of graves and human remains.⁴ One of the researchers who has so far been involved in researching human remains in approximately one hundred mass graves, mostly from the period at the end of the Second World War, persistently referred to the dead as skeletons: "I only work with the skeletons ... For me, they are skeletons." (InterlocutorJR004, 28.8.2024). This researcher specializes in investigation of bones and skeletons and is only involved when human remains have already been discovered, such as during construction work or in the systematic documentation of the suspected mass graves. The researcher helps *in situ* with exhumations, cleaning, measuring, counting and examining the bones. Sometimes skeletons are found in a nice shape, with all the bones accounted for. Often, the bones are crushed, decomposed, mixed with soil and rocks.

⁴ No apparitions or similar encounters were mentioned among the researchers. However, narratives of ghosts can be common among the locals near recent mass graves or among the relatives of the victims, and have a strong political charge that points to unresolved issues in the society (e.g. Kwon 2008; Mencej 2021).

[In Huda Jama] they made me a wooden trough, five meters long, and installed some lights on it, which were poor. Then the right femur bones were washed and dried, and then we measured them outside in a container when they were dry. Yes, basically everything was done in the field. (InterlocutorJR004, 28.8.2024).

At another recent mass grave site, Jama pod Macesnovo gorico, which is located deep in the Kočevje forest, and was excavated in 2022, they worked in the open. During the exhumation all the bones were removed from the cave, cleaned, arranged and left to dry. "You can't put them away because they start to mold, so they have to be completely dry before they go to the ossuary or wherever." In the subsequent reports of this excavation, images of the sorted bones outside the caves circulated in the media and had a significant impact on the public. The bones were sorted and examined to determine the number of victims, their sex, and, if possible, their approximate age. All right femur bones are stored separately for possible future identification of victims through DNA analysis. "The femur is one of the most recognizable bones, and it is usually the easiest to preserve, which is why right femurs are preserved." Other bones often get crushed or decompose.

Sometimes they [the skeletons] are neatly stacked, which means that they can be, as we say, individualized. But in mass graves, everything is thrown into one pit. Everything is taken out, washed, because it must be washed there, and then I count all the bones. I count the left and right femurs, the left and right hip bones, the ulna bones... If it is a smaller burial ground, where there were about 50 of them, I count all the bones. All the long ones, let's say, and the lower jawbones. Where it's fragmented, no, you can't, no. (InterlocutorJR002, 23.8.2024).

The researcher also stressed that this is not a proper forensic analysis, so the cause of death is usually not formally determined, at least not in cases involving such a high number of bodies.

In Macesnovo gorica I counted the injuries, if there were any signs, any wounds caused by sharp weapons. I think I found two, and probably two or three bayonet wounds, and some gunshot wounds. On skulls you can still see wounds quite clearly, but not on long bones, no. Also, the bullets don't always hit the bones. (InterlocutorJR004, 28.8.2024).

Nevertheless, this kind of technical knowledge is important for interpretation of the historical event and the circumstances of the killings. For one of the mass graves, this researcher recalled that some oral accounts mentioned that the people there were tortured

and had their heads cut off before they were disposed of. She countered this narrative by examining all the vertebrae and found no evidence that the heads had been severed from the bodies:

[According to] the testimonies, they pulled out their teeth, took everything from them, chopped off their heads. I went through all the vertebrae, all the skulls, I took everything out, examined it, photographed it. I said, “Now it’s like this: there were 89 of them, here you have the first 89 vertebrae, the second vertebrae, the third, the fourth, the base of the skull, not one of them shows any signs of damage or breakage or anything that would indicate that they were cut off.” Whoever had gold teeth still has them. We also found necklaces and rosaries, so I don’t think there’s any indication that they were looted.

This is how they were killed. Except for two bayonet wounds, I didn’t find any injuries that would indicate they were beaten on the head. But there were gunshot wounds, which are common in executions, here behind the ears, mostly located here. I think only one or two were found. Let’s say there was an entry wound here [points to the body]. It looks like they were... They were probably kneeling or something. But it’s interesting. There are very few of those. Occasionally, we find a bullet, like in the hip bone, and in the femur. But for the vast majority, we don’t know how they died. (InterlocutorJR004, 28.8.2024).

Photo 4

Mass grave Jama pod Macesnovo gorico in Kočevski rog after the exhumation. Photo by Repič, 2024.



Another example of contested interpretations, this time in the media, occurred at the Košnica mass grave site near Celje and Laško:

There were talks that at that stream, they had killed and buried 600 civilians, men, women, and children from Celje and the surrounding area, or something like that. Well, and then they dug them up, yes, 300 of them, all men over the age of 18. There were no civilians among them, I think, because they had all sorts of Ustasha, Home Guard uniforms, I don't know. Although they could wear any uniform, I think, whatever was available. And the media reported that nearly 600 had been found, many women and children. (InterlocutorJR004, 28.8.2024).

The work with mass graves receives much more media and public attention than most other archaeological work with graves.

I often hear comments that our work is not respectful. But how else can we work with the bones? ... We all became a little numb, but in this kind of work you have to be. (InterlocutorJR004, 28.8.2024).

Another researcher, an archaeologist, also mentioned that people sometimes view their technical work with human remains as disrespectful. "Of course, if they see someone sawing bones..." But he added:

There is no other way, and some do not understand these procedures; they see them as disrespectful. Personally, from a research and scientific point of view, I am interested in trying to do as much as possible, to find out as much as possible about this person. Some people see scientific procedures as disrespectful, some would just dig them up and bury them and say, there is nothing to investigate because they do not consider it respectful to deal with issues that are so close [in time]. But I think it's the opposite, isn't it, that it's more disrespectful not to try to get as much information as possible about who this person was and to try to identify him. (InterlocutorJR002, 23.8.2024).

A crucial, but often missing, piece of information in the investigation of mass graves is the identification of the victims. In some countries, all exhumed bodies from mass graves are subjected to DNA analysis for possible identification, and large databases are being created (e.g. Wagner, 2008; Ferrándiz, Robben, 2015; Rosenblatt, 2015; Anstett, Dreyfus, 2015b). In Slovenia DNA analysis has been done only occasionally, usually when surviving family members were searching for their deceased relatives or when entire families were buried in a mass grave (see Zupanič Pajnič, Obal, Zupanc, 2020). When relatives are involved, identification can be achieved, although with only occa-

sional success. An interlocutor in Argentina told me how they searched for relatives and ordered the excavation of a small mass grave where they thought their relatives must be. Human remains were indeed discovered in that grave, but the DNA tests showed that the remains did not belong to their relatives. They didn't continue their search—a reburial of these remains was also “a symbolic burial of the relatives”. (InterlocutorJR018, 13.4.2025).

One archaeologist recalled a case of successful identification when relatives of the deceased also initiated the search.:

But there are also cases, these smaller things, like we had in Šentvid, where we dug up two bodies that the family was looking for, identified them, and then buried them in the family graves. The relatives actually initiated the exhumation. They somehow found out that their relatives were buried there and decided to go ahead with it (the exhumation). At first, we didn't find the right grave, because the DNA test was negative. But we tried again and (at the next excavation) the DNA test was positive. With these larger (mass graves), there is no active identification process because there are simply too many samples. The right femurs are being stored for the future, that is, when these procedures become much cheaper. (InterlocutorJR002, 23.8.2024).

William Maples, in his book *Dead Men Do Tell Tales*, emphasizes the significance of forensic anthropology in both modern criminal investigations and in resolving historical mysteries. He writes: “Truth is discoverable. Truth *wants* to be discovered (added emphasis). [...] The science of forensic anthropology, properly wielded, can resolve historical riddles.” (Maples, 1994: 6). Similarly, Zoë Crossland observes:

When the sign of a corpse is revealed, action must be taken, and a certain kind of action is required. The discovery of human remains immediately points to something disturbing that happened in the past, and in so doing demands a particular response. The unexpected appearance of the dead petitions for investigation and for their status to be established (Crossland, 2017: 187).

Although the researchers of mass graves in Slovenia often refer to the dead as passive objects (skeletons, human remains etc.), they recognize the need for identification of the dead, as has been done in some other countries, which would transform the collective and nameless remains into persons and victims. They also acknowledge that their work is embedded in a broader struggle over memory and interpretation. Inherently, the dead in these mass graves exert agency in social changes—not directly, but through accounts

of their deaths, commemorations and political morality that revolve around the subsequent social lives of the exhumed human remains.

Crossland positions the agency of the researcher in relation to the agency of the human remains (2017, p. 181–182). The dead speak metaphorically while remaining silent: they testify only in relation to their discovery, exhumation, and forensic, archaeological, or anthropological analysis. Bones and associated objects tell different stories—of identity, sex, life, age, and death, possible postmortem mutilation. But they “speak” only within a restricted field of knowledge produced by researchers working with limited sets of remains. As one of the researchers emphasized: “If you say something, you have to say that you’re assuming based on this and that. Not that it was like that, because you can’t know.” (InterlocutorJR004, 28.8.2024). In a sense, exhumed bodies enact agency, “tell stories”, reanimate memory, shape historical understandings, etc., but only in the entanglement with researchers, mass grave sites, associated excavated objects, living relatives, and other social actors.

Photo 5

A memorial at the mass grave Jama pod Krenom in Kočevski rog. Photo by Repič, 2024.



Conclusion: Exhumation of the dead in mass graves and transformation of their role in the contemporary society

Anstett and Dreyfus (2015a) and Rubin (2020) noted that since the 1990s the investigations of mass graves, exhumations and, in some cases, identifications of victims, have led to the so-called “forensic turn”, which on the one hand has led to historical re-interpretations and on the other has facilitated the reintegration—symbolic, social, and material—of the dead into the society. Admir Jugo and Sari Wastell (2015) show how forensic investigations of mass graves not only enable biological identification, but also generate broader social and political processes, such as reshaping social memory, demanding political responsibility and justice, and facilitating the return and culturally appropriate reburial of victims.

The aim of this article is twofold: on the one hand, it introduces the topic of mass graves in Slovenia from the Second World War. Although the issue of mass graves is not new in social and cultural anthropology, mass graves in Slovenia have been studied mostly from historical, archaeological, geographical and other perspectives, while studies from the perspective of social and cultural anthropology have been rather rare. The second, and main, aim of the article is to analyze the way in which the dead affect individuals and society in the context of mass grave research. The research of mass graves, exhumation, identification and reburial are symbolic counterparts to the executions and hidden burials in which the victims were materially, socially, and symbolically excluded from society and degraded from persons to less-than-humans through the denial of burial. Through exhumation, the dead emerge from obscurity, silence, or deliberate forgetting, opening up struggles over memory. Their reappearance—material, symbolic, and political—compels action: recognition, historical revision, memorialization, reburial, or other forms of reparation. The living are affected by their very presence, whether as bones, personal artifacts, or the landscape of mass graves.

The article argues that the material and symbolic presence of the dead exert agency in the complex network of actors. The analysis employs the concept of relational or distributed agency as “divided and shared out among multiple individuals while still being anchored in a single, sometimes decades-long, course of action” (Enfield, 2017, p. 10). It demonstrates that the exhumed dead bodies affect the individuals and compel action. According to Crossland, such an approach also requires a “move away from a view of agency as inhering only in the living, and instead to view it as a collaborative semiotic project that is also shaped and constrained by the dead” (2017, p. 188). Instead, the capacity to affect and demand (re)action is enacted in a network of actors (researchers, relatives, locals, media, actors in memory politics), exhumed bodies, other excavated ob-

jects, and the material and spatial presence of mass graves. In such network of actors, when mass graves are exhumed, human remains are transformed from inert objects into relevant actors in social and political life, capable of catalyzing social processes of historical revision, mourning, commemoration, and reshaping relations between the living and the dead.

AI disclaimer

The author declares that generative artificial intelligence was not used in the preparation of this manuscript.

References

- Anstett, É. (2018). What is a mass grave? Toward an anthropology of human remains treatment in contemporary contexts of mass violence. In A. C. G. M Robben (Ed.), *A companion to the anthropology of death* (pp. 177–188). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119222422.ch13>
- Anstett, É. & Dreyfus, J. M., (Eds.) (2015a). *Human remains and identification: Mass violence, genocide, and the “forensic turn.”* Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719097560.001.0001>
- Anstett, É. & Dreyfus, J. M. (2015b). Why exhume, why identify? In É. Anstett & J. M. Dreyfus (Eds.), *Human remains and identification: Mass violence, genocide, and the “forensic turn”* (pp. 1–13). Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526125019.00006>
- Corselis, J. (1997). The Slovenian political emigration 1945–1950. *Dve domovini/Two homelands*, 8, 131–159.
- Crossland, Z. (2000). Buried lives: Forensic archaeology and the disappeared in Argentina. *Archaeological dialogues*, 7(2), 146–159. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1380203800001707>.
- Crossland, Z. (2017). The agency of the dead. In N. J. Enfield & P. Kockelman (Eds.), *Distributed agency* (pp. 181–189). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190457204.003.0019>
- Dežman, J. (2019). Slovenija in vojna grobišča: Dolga tranzicija. In J. Dežman (Ed.), *Nemoč laži. Poročilo 4. Komisije Vlade RS za reševanje vprašanj prikritih grobišč 2011–2018* (pp. 110–137). Družina.
- Dutermé, C. (2016). Honouring, commemorating, compensating: State and civil society in response to victims of the armed conflict in the Ixil region (Guatemala). *Human remains and violence*, 2(2), 3–20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/HRV.2.2.2>

- Enfield, N. J. (2017). Distribution of agency. In N. J. Enfield & P. Kockelman (Eds.), *Distributed agency* (pp. 9–14). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190457204.003.0002>
- Enfield, N. J. & Kockelman, P., eds. (2017). *Distributed agency*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190457204.001.0001>
- Feitlowitz, M. (1998). *A lexicon of terror: Argentina and the legacies of torture*. Oxford University Press.
- Ferenc, M. (2005). *Prikrito in očem zakrito. Prikrita grobišča 60 let po koncu druge svetovne vojne*. Muzej novejšje zgodovine.
- Ferenc, M. (2012). *Prekopi žrtev iz prikritih grobišč (1991–2011)*. Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Ferrándiz, F. (2013). Exhuming the defeated: Civil war mass graves in 21st-century Spain. *American ethnologist*, 40(1), 38–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12004>
- Ferrándiz, F. (2015). Mass graves, landscapes of terror: A Spanish tale. In F. Ferrándiz & A. C. G. M. Robben (Eds.), *Necropolitics: Mass graves and exhumations in the age of human rights* (pp. 92–118). University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812291322-006>
- Ferrándiz F. 2022. *Francisco Franco is back: The contested reemergence of a fascist moral exemplar*. *Comparative studies in society and history*, 64(1), 208–237. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S001041752100044X>
- Ferrándiz F. & Robben, A. C. G. M. (2015). Introduction: The ethnography of exhumations. In F. Ferrándiz & A. C. G. M. Robben (Eds.), *Necropolitics: Mass graves and exhumations in the age of human rights* (pp. 1–38). University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812291322-002>
- Gell, A. (1998). *Art and agency: An anthropological theory*. Clarendon press.
- Grasseni, C. (2009). Introduction. In C. Grasseni (Ed.), *Skilled visions: Between apprenticeship and standard* (pp. 1–19). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781845452100>
- Guillou, A. (2012). An alternative memory of the Khmer Rouge genocide: The dead of the mass graves and the land guardian spirits. *South east Asia research*, 20(2), 207–226. <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2012.0102>
- Hallam, E., Hockey, J. & Howarth G. (1999). *Beyond the body: Death and social identity*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203982174>.
- Harper, S. (2010). The social agency of dead bodies. *Mortality*, 15(4), 308–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2010.513163>.
- Jarvis, H. (2015). Powerful remains: The continuing presence of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime in today's Cambodia. *Human remains and violence: An interdisciplinary journal*, 1(2), 36–55. <https://doi.org/10.7227/HRV.1.2.5>

- Jessee, E. & Skinner, M. (2005). A typology of mass grave and mass grave-related sites. *Forensic science international*, 152(1), 55–59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2005.02.031>
- Jugo, A., & Wastell, S. (2015). Disassembling the pieces, reassembling the social: The forensic and political lives of secondary mass graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In É. Anstett & J. M. Dreyfus (Eds.), *Human remains and identification: Mass violence, genocide and the “forensic turn”* (pp. 142–174). Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526125019.00013>
- Kévorkian, R. (2014). Earth, fire, water: Or how to make the Armenian corpses disappear. In É. Anstett & J. M. Dreyfus (Eds.), *Destruction and human remains: Disposal and concealment in genocide and mass violence* (pp. 89–116). Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719096020.003.0005>
- Kocmur, M. (1965–1971). *Odprti grobovi*. Vol. 1–4. Editorial Baraga.
- Korman, R. (2014). The Tutsi body in the 1994 genocide: Ideology, physical destruction, and memory. In É. Anstett & J. M. Dreyfus (Eds.), *Destruction and human remains: Disposal and concealment in genocide and mass violence* (pp. 226–242). Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719096020.003.0010>
- Kozina, F. (1970). Beg iz Kočevskega roga. *Tabor* (Buenos Aires) 4, 5, 6. <http://slovenski-narod.blogspot.com/2011/08/beg-iz-kocevskega-roga.html>
- Kozina, F. (1990). Janko Svete, rešenec iz jame v Rogu. *Tabor* (Buenos Aires) September/October, 233–235.
- Košir, U., & Rozman, L. (2025). Archaeology of a mass murder: The concealed gravesite of Jama pod Macesnovo gorico in Slovenia. *European journal of archaeology*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eaa.2025.10021>
- Kovač, T. (1968). *V Rogu ležimo pobiti*. Buenos Aires.
- Kwon, H. (2008). The ghosts of war and the spirit of cosmopolitanism. *History of religion*, 48(1), 22–42. <https://doi.org/10.1086/592153>
- Lopez-Mazz, J. (2015). The concealment of bodies during the military dictatorship in Uruguay (1973–84). In É. Anstett & J. M. Dreyfus (Eds.), *Human remains and identification: Mass violence, genocide and the “forensic turn”* (pp. 83–97). Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719097560.003.0004>
- Losonczy, A. M. (2016). Murderous returns: Armed violence, suicide and exhumation in the Emberá Katío economy of death (Chocó and Antioquia, Colombia). *Human remains and violence*, 2(2), 67–83. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/HRV.2.2.6>
- Maples, W. (1994). *Dead men do tell tales: The strange and fascinating cases of a forensic anthropologist*. Random House.
- Mencej, M. (2021). The dead, the war, and ethnic identity: Ghost narratives in post-war Srebrenica. *Folklore*, 132(4), 412–433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2021.1905380>

- Ranalletti, M. (2014). When death is not the end: Toward a typology of the treatment of corpses of "disappeared detainees" in Argentina from 1975 to 1983. In É. Anstett & J. M. Dreyfus (Eds.), *Destruction and human remains: Disposal and concealment in genocide and mass violence* (pp. 146–179). Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526125002.00013>
- Rant, J. (1998). *Zbornik dela v zvestobi in ljubezni – Zedinjena Slovenija 1948–1998*. Društvo Zedinjena Slovenija.
- Renshaw, L. (2016). Exhuming loss: Memory, materiality, and mass graves of the Spanish civil war. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315428697>
- Repič, J. (2006). "Po sledovih korenin": Transnacionalne migracije med Argentino in Evropo. Filozofska fakulteta.
- Repič, J. (2014). Rituals in the Slovenian diasporic community in Argentina. In D. Parusheva & L. Gergova (Eds.), *The ritual year 8: Migrations* (pp. 78–95). Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.
- Repič, J. (2016). Tracing roots: Slovenian diaspora in Argentina and return mobilities. In N. G. Bon & J. Repič (Eds.), *Moving places: Relations, return, and belonging* (pp. 85–104). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781785332432-005>
- Repič, J. (2019). Yugoslavia from the other side: Memorialization of the Yugoslavian communist revolution among Slovenians in Argentina. *Łódzkie studia etnograficzne*, 58, 117–134. <https://doi.org/10.12775/LSE.2019.58.07>
- Robben, A. C. G. M. (2000). The assault on basic trust: Disappearance, protest, and reburial in Argentina. In A. C. G. M. Robben & M. M. Suárez-Orozco (Eds.), *Cultures under siege: Collective violence and trauma* (pp. 70–101). Cambridge University Press.
- Robben, A. C. G. M. (2005). *Political violence and trauma in Argentina*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rosenblatt, A. (2015). *Digging for the disappeared: Forensic science after atrocity*. Stanford University Press.
- Rubin, J. (2020). Exhuming dead persons: Forensic science and the making of post-fascist publics in Spain. *Cultural Anthropology*, 35(3), 345–373. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca35.3.01>
- Straede, T. (2015). The dead bodies of Bobruisk, Belarus 1941–45. *Human remains and violence: An interdisciplinary journal*, 1(1), 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.7227/HRV.1.1.3>
- Svašek, M. (2007). *Anthropology, art and cultural production*. Pluto Press.
- Švent, R. (2007). *Slovenski begunci v Avstriji 1945–1950*. ZRC SAZU.
- Verdery, K. (1999). *The political lives of dead bodies: Reburial and postsocialist change*. Columbia University Press.

- Wagner, S. (2008). *To know where he lies: DNA technology and the search for Srebrenica's missing*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520942622>
- Williams, H. (2004). Death warmed up: The agency and bones in early Anglo-Saxon cremation rites. *Journal for Material Culture*, 9(3), 263–291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183504046894>.
- Zajec, M., Kozina, F. & Dejak, F. (1998). *Ušli so smrti. Poročila treh rešencev iz množičnega groba v Kočevskem Rogu*. Mohorjeva založba.
- Zamparutti, L. (2015). *Foibe literature: Documentation or victimhood narrative? Human remains and violence: An interdisciplinary journal*, 1(1), 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.7227/hrv.1.1.6>.
- Zupanič Pajnič, I., Obal, M. & Zupanc, T. (2020). Identifying victims of the largest Second World War family massacre in Slovenia. *Forensic science international*, 306, 1–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2019.110056>

Povzetek

V Sloveniji je več sto množičnih grobišč, večinoma iz časa druge svetovne vojne, zlasti iz obdobja neposredno po vojni, ko so potekale izvensodne množične usmrtitve. Članek predstavlja antropološke perspektive raziskovanja in ekshumacije množičnih grobišč in se osredotoča na vprašanje, kako posamezniki, ki so vključeni v raziskovanje množičnih grobišč in ekshumacije, doživljajo mrtve, človeške ostanke ter materialnost in prostorskost množičnih grobišč. Članek posebej obravnava, kako je mogoče razumeti tvornost mrtvih v kontekstu raziskovanja množičnih grobišč ter kako ekshumacije vplivajo na posameznike, družbene akcije in spremembe družbenega statusa mrtvih. Pri analizi uporablja koncept relacijske ali porazdeljene tvornosti, ki deluje v mreži različnih akterjev (sorodniki, lokalno prebivalstvo, ljudje, vključeni v raziskovanje, ekshumacije in spominjanje), krajev množičnih grobišč in materialnosti človeških ostankov. Z izkopom človeških ostankov iz množičnih grobišč se ti spremenijo iz inertnih predmetov v pomembne akterje, ki delujejo v družbenem in političnem življenju, vplivajo na posameznike in spodbujajo družbene procese.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Slovenija, množična grobišča, ekshumacija, tvornost, človeški ostanki

CORRESPONDENCE: Jaka Repič, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Aškerčeva 2, SI-1000, Slovenia. E-mail: jaka.repic@ff.uni-lj.si