



Authoritarian vernaculars of the right to truth. Exhuming mass graves in Rwanda and Burundi

written by Astrid Jamar
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Astrid Jamar (SOAS) and Laura Major (University of Strathclyde) will present on 'Authoritarian vernaculars of the right to truth. Exhuming mass graves in Rwanda and Burundi'. Gerhard Anders (University of Edinburgh) will act as discussant.



When: 7 May 2021 / 2.00-3.30 pm CET

Link: <https://zoom.us/j/93210372616pwd=dTZZ...>

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Abstract

The national governments of Rwanda and Burundi are exhuming mass graves with the promise of revealing truths about the contested histories of past conflict and genocide. In Rwanda, exhumations have been conducted by Rwandan volunteers under the auspices of a government programme to recover and conserve the bodies of victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi. Since December 2019, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Burundi have also begun mass exhumations; these efforts are motivated by truth-seeking and reconciliation aspirations but also help to articulate a specific narrative of victimhood and state legitimacy. In both cases, the state employs a vernacularised form of forensic practice with techniques that differentiate remains and prepare them for public display but with much other forensic intention and method absent. In this article we draw upon and then extend Merry's work on the vernacularisation of human rights principles (1996; 2006) in assessing the articulation between these efforts, the global rise of discourse and mobilisation of the 'right to truth' and the associated practice of forensic exhumation. Drawing upon our ethnographic fieldwork in Rwanda and Burundi, we argue that the ambiguities of the 'right to truth' and the political nature of truth-making render these exhumations powerful political tools that in these settings allow the mobilization and consolidation of particular authoritarian vernaculars.



See you on Zoom!

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