

Forensics and the Post-Holocaust Politics of Dead Bodies in Poland

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This presentation focuses on recent controversies surrounding forensic investigations of mass graves dating back to the Holocaust considered here through the prism of necropolitics, conceptualized as a multi-layered set of processes through which the dead are governed, inscribed with meaning, mobilized symbolically and politically, and subjected to commemoration. It takes as a vantage point the 2016 amendment of the bill of the Institute of National Remembrance, which unlike the change proposed in 2018 (the 'Holocaust law'), largely escaped public attention. It could be seen to open new chapter in Polish post-Holocaust politics of dead bodies: as it establishes forensic investigation as a standard procedure to be applied to all recovered remains of "Polish citizens" that fell victim to political violence, constructed here, not in ethnic but in civic terms. The Jewish dead (against the wishes of rabbinical authorities) also become subject to the authority of the Polish state. Interrogating this seemingly inclusive stance, I ask how the deployment of forensics partakes in the production and/or undoing of the dead establishing various forms of 'necropolitical citizenship,' based on complementary operations of necropolitical inclusion and/or exclusions. At the same time, in this paper, I focus on the implications of the turn towards forensics, including the reliance on and political instrumentalization of the truth regimes of forensics, for the memory and representations of the Holocaust in contemporary post-Communist Poland.