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The Corpse after War: Visibility, Recognition, and the Persistence of Postmortem Violence

El cadáver después de la guerra: visibilidad, reconocimiento y persistencia de la violencia postmortem

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Abstract

This article argues that, in contemporary conflicts, organized collective violence persists beyond armed combat through postmortem practices that differentially manage corpses. Through a historical-conceptual analysis of the Western rationalization of war, the article shows that corpses cease to operate as a symbolic closure of conflict and acquire a structuring function in the organization of space, fear, and collective belonging. This mutation destabilizes the classic distinction between war and peace by keeping the temporality of conflict open when corpses remain outside both the legal and social order. In this framework, postmortem exclusion establishes hierarchies of recognition that are incompatible with democratic equality, so that the restitution of corpses is proposed as an ethical and political condition for the restructuring of the common order in contexts of prolonged violence.

Keywords: necrohumanism; forensic philosophy; war; conflicts; restitution; public peace.

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http://doi.org/10.46652/rgn.v11i50.1639
ISSN 2477-9083
Vol. 11 No. 50, abril-junio, 2026, e2601639
Quito, Ecuador

Enviado: marzo 13, 2026
Aceptado: mayo 23, 2026
Publicado: junio 05, 2026
Publicación Continua

Resumen

Este artículo sostiene que, en los conflictos contemporáneos, la violencia colectiva organizada persiste más allá del combate armado mediante prácticas postmortem que gestionan de manera diferencial los cadáveres. A través de un análisis histórico-conceptual de la racionalización occidental de la guerra, se plantea que los cadáveres dejan de operar como clausura simbólica del conflicto y adquieren una función estructurante en la organización del espacio, del miedo y de la pertenencia comunitaria. Esta mutación desestabiliza la distinción clásica entre guerra y paz al mantener abierta la temporalidad del conflicto cuando los cadáveres permanecen fuera tanto del orden jurídico como del orden social. En este marco, la exclusión postmortem establece jerarquías de reconocimiento incompatibles con la igualdad democrática, por lo cual la restitución de los cadáveres se propone como una condición ética y política para la reconfiguración del orden común en contextos de violencia prolongada.
Palabras clave: necrohumanismo; filosofía forense; guerra; conflictos; restitución; paz pública.

Introduction

In many contemporary conflicts, the end of armed hostilities does not coincide with the end of violence, as violence continues in the social, political, and institutional treatment of corpses that remain unidentified, unrecovered, and outside the common order. Under these conditions, the war remains unresolved as long as the dead bodies continue to be excluded from the social and legal framework. In these contexts, violence exceeds the physical destruction of human lives and is prolonged through practices of concealment, degradation, and differential management of bodies, which hinders the resolution of the conflict and compromises the very possibility of peace.

In recent decades, this mutation has called into question the conceptual frameworks from which political philosophy, law, and ethics have thought about war and its aftermath. Beyond the realm of representation, this transformation affects ways of thinking about and recording death in scenarios where extreme violence alters the conditions of existence. In such contexts, categories such as *victim*, *reparation*, or *end of conflict* show obvious limitations in the face of experiences marked by forced disappearance, the exposure of desecrated corpses, and their residual treatment within the social order.

In these contexts of high-intensity violence, dead bodies cease to be seen exclusively as collateral effects of armed confrontation and begin to influence the organization of space, fear, and collective affections. The way in which corpses are treated, hidden, or removed from public recognition thus becomes a relevant element in understanding the persistence of violence once the armed conflict has ended. This raises the question that guides this work: How does the political and social management of corpses in contemporary conflicts sustain the continuity of organized collective violence after the end of armed hostilities and reconfigure the thresholds from which peace and democracy can be viable?

This shift forces us to rethink the categories used to conceptualize war and its aftermath under certain circumstances. In particular, the distinction between *wartime* and *peacetime* becomes blurred when violence remains active through *postmortem* practices that affect mourning and recognition. Under such conditions, peace cannot be thought of solely as the absence of combat,

but rather as a process involving the ontological, legal, sociopolitical, and cultural treatment of corpses and their relationship to the common order. Without this openness to public discussion, conflict tends to reproduce itself in less visible, but no less effective, forms. Thus, this work examines how, in contemporary conflicts, organized collective violence can persist beyond armed combat through the management of corpses, which extends violence into the postwar period, hinders the consolidation of peace, and affects the sensitive and ethical perception of the social order. From this perspective, the analysis aims to reconsider the status of corpses in contemporary conflicts, focusing on their role in prolonged violence and their impact on the configuration of the social order after armed conflict.

Methodology

The research is based on qualitative methodologies typical of the critical humanities, combining a *historical-hermeneutic* approach with a *critical-constructive* analysis aimed at examining the logic of corpse production and its role in the persistence of contemporary violence. This approach allows the corpse to be treated as an analytical category from which power relations, political temporalities, and forms of social organization are reordered. In this sense, the analysis also considers the historical transformation of political concepts in relation to the experiences that shape their semantic field, following the insights of Reinhart Koselleck, who showed that political concepts change when historical experiences modify the semantic horizon in which they operate (Koselleck, 2004). The historical-hermeneutic approach draws on historical texts and contexts in order to understand the agency of the corpse in scenarios of extreme violence, enabling the reconstruction of historical processes, the identification of discursive architectures, and the conceptual exploration of the violated corpse in the social, legal, and political configurations that traverse it (Vargas Beal, 2011).

Complementarily, critical-constructive analysis examines conventional interpretations of violence and the dead body by situating them in material, symbolic, and normative assemblages. From this perspective, the analysis aims to clarify the mechanisms by which the corpse is produced, managed, and administered as part of the power dynamics that sustain the continuity of conflict, based on the confluence of historical, philosophical, and legal sources (Carbone et al., 2023). The work is also developed from a qualitative-interpretative approach focused on the conceptual and discursive analysis of the corpse in different sociopolitical and necro-spatial articulations, thereby seeking to privilege theoretical and textual sources in which the categories emerge from the research process itself (Pizarro, 1998).

Finally, the *hermeneutic-critical* method guides the analysis toward problematizing the material and symbolic conditions that determine the production of the corpse in contexts of extreme violence, allowing for an examination of its ontological and political dimensions in relation to spaces of power, regimes of visibility, and forms of *postmortem* exclusion (Kinsella, 2006).

Results

Historical and conceptual analysis shows that, in the Western tradition organized collective violence, paradigmatically expressed in war, has operated as a structuring device of the collective order (social, legal, and political), rather than as an exceptional interruption of collective life. From Greek imaginaries to medieval theological and legal formulations, organized violence is integrated as a legitimate mechanism for producing cohesion, hierarchy, and authority.

It can also be observed that the progressive rationalization of war, through *bellum iustum*, the theology of combat, and modern doctrines of legitimacy, rather than leading to the overcoming of violence, has led to its normative administration. This trajectory consolidates a political rationality in which the legitimate exercise of force and the management of its effects become the foundations of state order.

The study identifies a decisive mutation in contemporary conflicts: the corpse ceases to function as a symbolic closure of the conflict and takes on an active role in the prolongation of violence. In this framework, corpses operate as devices for territorial control, affective regulation, and the production of fear, by reordering community belonging and establishing hierarchies between lives and deaths.

Finally, the analysis shows that the *postmortem* exclusion of corpses produces a structural fracture in the contemporary democratic community. Peace and democracy remain incomplete as long as the absent bodies are not re acognized, identified, and returned to the common world. The restitution of the corpse thus constitutes an ethical and political condition for the recomposition of social order in contexts of extreme violence.

Discussion

War and the Western Rationalization of Collective Violence

The *West* can be understood as a historical-cultural construct that encompasses traditions and sociopolitical dynamics developed from classical antiquity to contemporary societies in Europe and its cultural extensions[1]; many of them adopted, many others imposed in other contexts. For the purposes of this discussion, *the West* designates a conceptual and historical horizon that articulates a set of ideas, institutions, and practices aimed at organizing, regulating, and codifying forms of human interaction. Thus, rather than a geographical demarcation, it presents itself as a civilizational formation that shapes forms of coexistence, criteria of legitimacy, and patterns of

1 The notion of the West is used here in an operational sense, with the recognition that recent historiographical research questions the idea of a continuous and homogeneous Western civilization. Mac Sweeney (2024, pp. 13-15), emphasizes that this trajectory lacks an uninterrupted "golden thread" and is more complex than the traditional narrative recognizes, while Quinn points (2024), that the values attributed to the West come from processes of exchange, appropriation, and hybridization. In this analysis, we are interested in the performative efficacy of this genealogical construction, particularly its role in the historical rationalization of war.

social and political structuring through the gradual instrumentalization and complexification of collective violence. In this context, its execution in war has acted as a mechanism for establishing order, capable of generating cohesion, hierarchy, and meaning within the civilizational structure.

Whether *civilization* is understood as a criterion of historicist temporality that draws a line of continuity between the primitive and progress, or as a process of technical expansion and domination over the environment, the concept operates as a classificatory principle that organizes peoples on an evolutionary scale and assigns them a place in history (Hartog, 2015, pp. 41-46; 59-63). This mode of temporalization –characteristic of modern European rationality– recognizes certain groups as legitimate custodians of time and places others in the condition of laggards or backward peoples, incorporating them into a regime of otherness that enables their subordination.

Let us pause for a moment on the operative idea that war is a key to understanding how Western societies interpret themselves, under the idea of conflict and the centripetal affects of belonging together with the centrifugal affects of hostility. Although a *cooperative and joyful human dimension of socialization* can be observed,[2] there is another trajectory of compression, namely *war*, since, as Malešević (2010), states, "the structural origins of national 'solidarity' cannot be understood without recognizing the role of war in the creation and maintenance of collective identities" (p. 191). This dimension, before appearing as a deviation from the rational order, acquires a structuring character.[3] Howard summarizes this operation by pointing out that war historically functions as an instrument of politics and state order (12) (Howard, 2009).

For the purposes of this collaboration, attention is directed to this dimension of war

From the founding wars to the colonization enterprises, there is a foresight and administration of the use of force aimed at causing harm which, far from limiting violence, integrates it into that civilizing project through figures such as destiny, law, punishment, strategy, or dispossession. This continuity runs through the history of the West from the Greek world to the present day, both in conflicts between peoples and in internal conflicts: "Organized violence should not be interpreted as irrationality; it is a strategic mechanism for obtaining information, territorial control, and subordination" (Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 1-7). Armitage also shows that wars (including civil wars) operate as devices for social, legal, and political reorganization (2017, pp. 12-16); contrary to what might be considered at first glance, civil wars do not only divide, but also produce new political structures, social reorganizations, identity reformulations, and new forms of authority.

2 The writings of Piotr Kropotkin and Lewis Mumford articulate a tradition that understands collective life through cooperation and conviviality. Kropotkin (2020, p. 76), presents cooperation as an affective source of cohesion and shared well-being, while Mumford (2018, p. 96), emphasizes that urban life develops through encounters and common practices that sustain communal existence.

3 Keeley (1996), reinforces this line of interpretation by arguing that there is no evidence of an original phase of peace preceding war and that, even in Neolithic settings, organized violence appears as a recurrent mechanism of social structuring.

This trajectory can be traced back to Greek imagery, given that it was with the Greeks that the idea of war as a space of confrontation emerged, where the collective destiny and the legitimacy of the established order are disputed (Vernant, 2001, p. 148), [16] (Detienne, 2007, p. 219) (de Romilly, 1997, p. 64), sometimes in the epic form of combat between equals, as seen in Homer (since this appears as the instance that legitimizes a certain social order, since the excellence of the warrior confirms the hierarchy that organizes the community); at other times as an extension of political life, as Plato and Aristotle maintain, as Loraux observes (1997, p. 54), when he states that: "The city continues the war within itself. Politics does not replace conflict: it manages it. It shifts it from the military arena to the civic arena, without suppressing it".

In the Roman world, this initial conception adopted a legal logic that reconfigured war under the notion of *bellum iustum*, whereby the use of force was subject to formal procedures that determined its legality (Jiménez Rojas, 2013, pp. 45-48). The *iustitia* of war is evaluated through deliberative and ceremonial instances: formal request to the enemy, senatorial consultation, ritual declaration, and authorization of combat. This system documents a historical form of force administration, in which violence acquires a public function and the character of a civic obligation.

Thus, invasion, conquest, or dispossession are articulated within a normative apparatus that establishes criteria for declaring war and regulating its conduct. In the early Republic, the rites of the fetials and the intervention of the *fetial* priests ensured the ritual sequence by which the conflict was legally enabled.[4] Only after the solemn demands had been fulfilled and the ritual formula pronounced was it declared that "the war was just, for the proper channels had been followed before the laws of Rome and, ultimately, before the gods" (Jiménez Rojas, 2013, p. 46).

As can be seen, the Roman expansion project is based on this articulation between law, ritual, and government, which provides armed conflict with a legal framework recognizable by the *civitas*; intended to establish the conditions under which war is considered lawful and binding on the community, through standardized stages that make force a regulated resource for ensuring public objectives (Egorov, 2019, pp. 56-57). This outlines a Roman policy aimed at the administration of violence as a matter of state, placing it within the political framework as a regular operator of social structuring.

In short, *bellum iustum* constitutes a technical regime for the authorization of conflict and transforms war into an ordering practice, capable of producing internal cohesion, discipline, and public recognition.

This normative figure distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate wars and establishes a criterion of legality that is projected onto subsequent executions of the legal-political order, including the extraordinary *malicidium*, as will be seen below.

4 Fetial rites and the intervention of fetial priests constituted a legal-religious device that authorized war in the Roman Republic through a ritual and deliberative sequence that guaranteed its formal legality. Once this procedure was completed, war acquired the status of bellum iustum, and violence was integrated into public law as a collective duty of the civitas, contributing to cohesion and obedience (Egorov, 2019, pp. 49-62).

Thus, in addition to dividing peoples against peoples, war reorders the survivors within the collective itself, since political legitimacy is based on the double privilege of war: those who exercise protective violence hold authority (to command) and authorization to kill.5 This structure is documented as a sustained mechanism for producing cohesion, hierarchy, and obedience based on the political function of war, since "political legitimacy is historically linked to the control of both organized violence and the administration of its results" (Fathi, 2023, p. 3), which prepares the historical transition to the High Middle Ages, when the justification of violence is inserted into a theological and moral horizon.

Subsequently, within the framework of Christian theology, particularly based on the formulations of Urban II expressed in the *Sermon of Clermont*[6] and the work of Bernard of Clairvaux,[7] a conception of war understood as an act of obedience and service to the divine will was consolidated.

In this framework, he distinguishes between *homicidium* (the act of killing a human being) and *malicidium* (the act of killing evil). The doctrinal operation aims to legitimize the figure of the Christian knight, insofar as the soldier who kills for a just cause (such as the protection of the innocent or the preservation of peace) does not commit *homicidium* in a legal or moral sense. Rather, his action is aimed at suppressing the evil that threatens the order desired by God, which reconfigures the very status of death inflicted in the context of war.

In both cases –both in the distinction between *homicidium* and *malicidium* elaborated by Bernard of Clairvaux and in the conception of holy war formulated by Urban II– warfare was integrated into a salvific logic, in which the theology of combat took on a penitential and redemptive meaning, characteristic of a spiritual horizon that turned war into a path of purification and religious merit[8]. Within the same framework, we find the formulation of Urban II, for whom *the Crusade* took on the character of a Holy War by granting remission of sins to those who fought against the enemies of God and establishing the act of fighting and killing as a penitential exercise. In this vein, (2017), argues that this theological-ritual architecture structured the understanding of combat as a spiritual discipline aimed at purification and inner merit (pp. 40-41, 240-242).

5 As Girard observes from an anthropological perspective: "violence preserves the community at the price of its victims; it brings the group together and makes communal life possible" (Girard, 1983, p. 37).

6 Urban II's Sermon of Clermont (1095), delivered during the Council of the same name, is known through several chronicle versions (Fulcher of Chartres, Robert the Monk, Baldric of Dol, and Guibert of Nogent). The doctrinal formulations in which Urban II links the fight against the enemies of God with the remission of sins and spiritual salvation can be found in critical studies (Munro, 1906; Riley-Smith, 1997), which systematize the sources and their reception.

7 Bernard of Clairvaux develops his theology of combat in Liber ad milites Templi: De laude novae militiae (In Praise New Knighthood, c. 1129-1136), addressed to Hugh de Payns, founder of the Order of the Temple. In this work, he legitimizes the figure of the miles Christi, the "knight who fights for God", distinguishing between homicidium and malicidium (Leclercq et al., 1963). The most widely used English translation is In praise of the new Knighthood (Bernard of Clairvaux, 1977).

8 Recent historiography on the Crusades identifies this doctrinal configuration by showing that the ecclesiastical Reform movement developed novel ideas about penitential warfare (Doucette & Møller, 2024), in which armed participation was construed as spiritually meritorious and associated with indulgences and the remission of sins, integrating military action into a Christian economy of salvation.

As can be seen, the conceptual dimension of this regime of meaning converges with what contemporary theory characterizes as *the myth of redemptive violence*, whose core rests on the assertion that "violence saves, war brings peace, and force establishes reason" (Wink, 1998, as cited in Finley, 2020, p. 69). This symbolic structure is consolidated in Western mythical genealogies where the use of physical violence saves individuals and the community, as well as in cosmogonic narratives that present the victory of order over evil chaos through destruction[9].

Thus, violence is represented as *a restorative force* that stabilizes the world and grants collective identity, so that war, and all the suffering it produces, participates in a spiritual economy of order, obedience, and salvation, which the West conceived. In this way, the already heroic and political understanding of war is gradually reordered towards an economy of salvation in the Middle Ages[10].

In this shift, it can be seen that armed conflict is historically restructured within a moral and eschatological horizon where the legal structures of Roman law remain, transformed, alongside the organizational concepts inherited from Greece. The analysis shows that the tradition of just war is based on the Roman legal elements of *ius gentium* and *ius naturale*, and that these principles support the transition to modern international law through the articulation between legitimate authority, just cause, and the restoration of peace (Johnson, 2017, pp. 463-464).

Although contemporary analyses (from Weber to Habermas, from Bell to Giddens) tend to represent modern social orders as the result of rationalization, bureaucratization, capitalist expansion, and scientific progress (Wagner, 1994, pp. 166-170); this dominant reading, as Bhambra points out, omits the fact that modernity was consolidated not *despite* but through colonial structures of violence, dispossession, and imperial hegemony (Bhambra, 2011, pp. 655-657). With these elements, therefore, it can be inferred that the teleological narrative, in the temporal tensions of the past, present, and future of Western modernity, before replacing war with rationalization, turns war into rationality, into a more refined tool for the production of meaning within nation-state collectives (Mann, 2013, pp. 429, 431; Malešević, 2010).

At this point, it should be noted that, despite historical transformations, inherited notions persist that trace a complex trajectory through which the West institutes conflict and enmity as structuring elements of its political rationality, so that the production of order is articulated through the systematic management of hostility. From the original disputes of the *polis* to the consolidation of the modern state, hostility appears as an accelerated organizing principle of relations and a delineator of spaces of authority. In the contemporary democratic framework, antagonism is not extinguished, since it finds a transfigured form in *agonism* through institutions, legality, and mutual recognition. From this perspective, hostility, beyond alluding to a circumstantial or episodic affect, refers to a structural power that sustains the political: the permanent possibility

9 Centuries earlier, Augustine argues that war can be considered just when it seeks to restore peace disturbed by injustice: "Those who wage war desire peace, and no one wants war except for the sake of peace" (Augustín, 2007, XIX. 12, p. 1048).

10 Scholastic systematization, particularly in Thomas Aquinas translates the sacralization of war into a moral doctrine that subjects it to criteria of legitimate authority, just cause, and right intention. In the Summa Theologiae, Aquinas articulates bellum iustum through these three conditions (Aquino, 2001, II-II, q. 40, a. 1).

of antagonism whose management enables certain forms of community existence (Mouffe, 2005, p. 15 et seq.). This persistence shows that war, the antagonism directed toward others, and the suffering produced by combat accompany the historical development of the West and have a direct impact, whether by consensus, subordination, or submission, on the ways in which death is produced, community is conceived, space is organized, power is exercised, and difference is constructed.

The Transformation of the Corpse in Contemporary Conflicts

However, if in the historical frameworks previously outlined by the West the corpse operated as a principle of political legitimation –whether on the battlefield, in the public epitaph, or in the state burial– in contemporary conflicts (including irregular wars, military interventions, internal disputes, or counterinsurgency exercises) this symbolic structure reveals a transmutation: the dead no longer consolidate the narrative of peace among the living, nor do they enter the heroic or legal archive with glorifying naturalness. In particular, murdered civilians, unidentified bodies, and the disappeared are signs that the conflict is far from over (Münkler, 2005; Kaldor, 1999).

In general terms, according to Hobsbawm (2007), unlike ancient wars between comparable armies, contemporary violence is dominated by the systematic killing of unarmed civilians (pp. 13-16). War is waged against civilians, not as collateral damage but as the main target of violence, so that the non-militarized body becomes a strategic target, a territory of hostility, and the ordinary body a preferred military target. Towards the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, various reports and statistical reviews showed that the proportion of civilian casualties in contemporary armed conflicts tends to exceed that of combatants and, depending on the context and counting method, ranges from approximately 30 to 70% of total casualties (Human Security Centre, 2005; Khorram-Manesh et al., 2021; Roberts, 2010); which implies that the defenseless bodies of children, women, and non-combatant men are the material center of multiple forms of armed power to deliberately cause harm (ONU, 2022).

In contexts of systematic annihilation, corpses cease to be a peripheral consequence of the conflict and become the operational core of violence. Their production, concealment, or display function as techniques of government and devices of terror aimed at the ontological disfigurement of the other (Cavarero, 2009, pp. 19-23; 35-38).

In regions of prolonged violence, the corpse ceases to be a marginal remnant and becomes a point of condensation of sociopolitical dispute. Their concealment, discovery, or circulation reveal conflicts over belonging to the common world, while storage spaces function as political-spatial devices that exclude certain dead from the community and prolong the logic of conflict beyond formal pacification (ICRC, 2016).

At the same time, the absence of the body establishes a suspended legal and emotional temporality, in which the search for the body (through forensic, legal, and social practices) becomes

the only way to gain access to recognition and the status of being someone before the law. In this sense, non-restitution transforms family members and communities into actors who inhabit a permanent dispute over the right to an identifiable dead person and permitted mourning, so that the conflict is reiterated in every daily act of searching (Melenotte, 2021, pp. 14–17; 24–29).

Under these conditions, characterized by what can be called a deficit of postmortem recognition, not only does peace remain unfinished, but democracy is also affected, insofar as the political community is defined by its ability to confer recognition, a name, and a place on all its members, including the dead (Keane, 2000, pp. 62–72).

A regime that declares pacification without restoring the absent is based on unequal access to recognition, which prevents democracy from being established as a principle of equality. Rather, suspended mourning, interrupted narratives, and the collective wound associated with the absent create a field of instability that belies any claim of harmony (Butler, 2023). It can be argued that, as long as the body is not returned or recognized, what is referred to as *democracy* or *public peace* is reduced to declarative formulations that operate on a discursive level, without achieving the status of an effective reality for the community. The absence of the bodies, inseparable from the absence of justice, introduces a fracture in the social pact, as the political community continues to be structured by differential hierarchies of recognition and dispossession (Nancy, 2000, pp. 35–48), which prevents the stabilization of a shared common order.

It is argued, then, that the possibility of effective peace in the community is interrupted as long as the absent bodies do not return to the common world. Thus, as long as the corpse remains outside the common order, violence persists as the organizing principle of collective life. Therefore, peace cannot be understood apart from the restitution of those who were expelled from the community, since only through this operation can the conditions for a common order be reconfigured (Domańska, 2020; Anstett, 2018). In the processes of transitional justice and justice in contexts of *ongoing* violence, this principle underpins the ethical and political requirement to recover, identify, and restore missing persons (Guglielmucci, 2022, pp. 135–139; Dreyfus & Anstett, 2016; Ferrándiz, 2007), in line with international frameworks such as *the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance* (ONU, 2006).

In this way, Latin American experiences reveal different modulations of this imperative. In Colombia, mortuary law and constitutional jurisprudence are moving toward the recognition of the corpse as a subject of state duty, which shifts the legal understanding of the dead body as waste toward the idea of an interlocutor that calls for responsibility (Ortega-Ruiz & Ducuara, 2019, pp. 87–92). In Argentina, the work of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team established an unprecedented grammar of mourning and truth, where the restitution of the body is assumed as a practice of recomposing the common world (Guglielmucci, 2020; Robben, 2010). Mexico, on the other hand, exposes institutional precariousness: the search and identification fall to relatives and collectives operating in the open, displacing forensic work to the territory in the face of state insufficiency (Lara & Rodríguez, 2020, pp. 149–160). These practices outline a restorative gesture

that reactivates the ethical relationship with nameless bodies and confronts the erosion of public sensitivity (Robledo, 2022)

Conclusions

The historical-conceptual development presented allows us to affirm that, in contemporary conflicts, organized collective violence does not end with the cessation of armed confrontation. Its persistence is articulated through practices that differentially manage corpses and prolong the logic of conflict in the post-war period. In this context, the dead body ceases to operate as a symbolic end to the war and takes on a structuring function in the organization of social space, collective affections, and the regimes of belonging that order communal life.

This shift forces us to reconsider the classic distinction between wartime and peacetime. Where corpses remain outside the legal, social, and symbolic order, violence continues to operate through administrative, spatial, and affective modalities that keep the temporality of the conflict open. Declared pacification, then, coexists with practices of postmortem exclusion that reveal the limits of the categories used to conceive of the end of war and the transition to political normality.

From this perspective, violence such as *postmortem* exclusion does not appear as a remnant of war, but as an active mechanism for producing unequal order. By instituting differential regimes of recognition, the management of corpses introduces a fracture in the political community that affects both the dead and the living. Under these conditions, peace and democracy are conditioned by structural inequality, given that the common order is configured on the denial of certain bodies and the suspension of their restitution to the common order.

Therefore, one of the aims of this work is to situate the corpse as a *post-war threshold,* understood as a critical point where the persistence of violence, disputes over identity, and tensions between legality, morality, and collective affectivity converge. This perspective allows us to shift the analysis of violence beyond armed combat and address its prolonged forms in the configuration of contemporary social life, even if these are less visible.

The approach adopted recognizes specific limitations. The analysis is situated on a philosophical-conceptual level and is not oriented toward the formulation of closed normative models or the provision of technical solutions that can be generalized to diverse historical and geopolitical contexts. Rather, its contribution consists of offering a framework of intelligibility that allows us to question the assumptions that guide legal, forensic, and empirical approaches. From this perspective, the return of the body is not understood as an immediate reparative effect, but as a minimum threshold from which the recomposition of the common horizon can be considered.

From this perspective, the return of bodies is presented as a critical, controversial, and necessary possibility in public discussion as the number of bodies produced by high-intensity conflicts increases. In such a scenario, its relevance does not lie in guaranteeing peace in itself, but rather in reconfiguring the thresholds of recognition, mourning, and collective responsibility. As

long as the absent bodies do not enter the common order that democratic institutions currently articulate, violence persists as the organizing principle of social life and peace remains in a state of suspension. Finally, thinking about the corpse from this perspective implies assuming that there can be no end to the conflict without an effective confrontation with its remains, nor any sustainable democratic possibility based on the exclusion of those who have been deprived even of the recognition of their death and of peace among the dead, whose safeguarding commits those who survive to a common responsibility of transgenerational care.

Note

This article is the result of a research stay at the Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Buenos Aires, hosted by Dr. Martín Buceta, within the framework of the Frontier Science project "Clandestine Graves in Contemporary Mexico from the Perspective of Forensic Philosophy," CF-I-1861, SECIHTI.

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Declaración

Conflicto de interés

No tenemos ningún conflicto de interés que declarar.

Financiamiento

Sin ayuda financiera de partes externas a este artículo.

Nota

El artículo es original y no ha sido publicado previamente.