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The Use of Forensic Archaeology in the Investigation of Human Rights Abuse: Unearthing the Past in East Timor

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the ways in which the relatively new, yet rapidly expanding discipline of forensic archaeology may contribute to the investigation of human rights abuses. A brief history of the development and applications of forensic archaeology in the investigation of global human rights abuses is provided. The paper then outlines the current procedures for investigating human rights abuses in East Timor and focuses on a case study of a reported, but officially unrecognised, massacre in East Timor, that of the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre. We discuss the ways in which forensic archaeologists can potentially assist in the investigation of this massacre and examine the ramifications of such an investigation for the future development of East Timor.

Whether total genocide occurs or not in East Timor depends not only on the remarkable powerful will of the Timorese people, but on the will of humanity, of us all.¹

There cannot be peace until people know what happened to their sons and daughters.²

Introduction

Despite the efforts of a generation of forensic anthropologists and archaeologists to promote careful excavation of large-scale crime scenes, the world watched while hundreds of bodies were bulldozed and torn from the earth in Iraq in early 2003 in a vain attempt by family members to find and identify their loved ones.³ It is possible to dismiss such humanitarian and forensic travesties as unavoidable happenings that would not be countenanced in the West. Nevertheless, it is also pertinent to question whether politics should dictate

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human rights agendas such that forensic science is only reactive: that is, can forensic scientists become advocates for intervention? In this contribution we seek to address this question by examining the possible role forensic archaeology can play in the investigation of human rights abuses in East Timor.

On 12 November 1991, Indonesian forces are alleged to have killed between 75 and 200 East Timorese civilians who were attending a funeral, and to have dumped their bodies in clandestine mass graves.⁴ Their deaths have never been investigated nor the remains found for return to their families. We believe that to ignore such events seriously retards forces of democratisation. We also argue that pro-active investigation by forensic scientists and humanitarian organisations of acknowledged mass graves throughout the world, created by conflict in the past century, must take place if our science is to meet basic ethical concerns. The community of international forensic scientists has in the past decade gained an unparalleled level of expertise in the investigation and exhumation of mass graves whose practitioners are historically poised as never before to apply their skills globally to neglected humanitarian and criminal events.

Human Rights Abuses, Archaeology and Mass Graves

Investigations into human rights abuses that involve mass killings are undertaken for two (not necessarily mutually exclusive) reasons: to obtain evidence for prosecution of alleged persecutors and for the humanitarian aim of retrieving the remains of victims for a positive identification so that surviving relatives can obtain some degree of closure. From the perspective of the archaeologist's concern with material objects, the important elements of this rigorous procedure are physical evidence of victim identity, timing and cause of death including peri-mortem trauma, and linkages to perpetrators. Both the legal and humanitarian mandates require the search for, and location and recovery of evidence from an event in the past, the traditional mandate of archaeology.

Archaeology has been defined as the study of the past from human remains. The discipline of archaeology has however, been overwhelmed by a perceptual problem, often being associated with ancient ruins, the exploits of Indiana Jones or Lara Croft, treasure hunting, tomb raiding and Egyptian mummies. Nonetheless, professional archaeologists provide a wealth of evidence and a multitude of interpretations about the ways in which humans have interacted with and/or exploited the environment in the past, their living conditions, health status, trade patterns, burial choices and so on. Archaeologists have been able to provide evidence about acts of violence (mass killings), which demonstrates that massacres (not always necessarily interpreted as genocide⁵) are sadly not new events.⁶ It is only relatively recently, however, that the importance of the methods used to collect evidence to investigate human rights abuses involving mass killing has been acknowledged. One of the more recent approaches used in such investigations involves the use of archaeological techniques.⁷

Forensic Archaeology: Development, Definitions, and Applications

Although the utility of human skeletal remains for personal identification was recognised as early as the nineteenth century,⁸ it was not until the early 1970s that anthropologists advocated the need for contextual information provided by archaeologists about where and how the remains were recovered in order to aid personal identification.⁹ The need

for controlled excavations by trained professionals became obvious as a result of the increasing number of cases involving buried remains that did not get to court due to poor recovery through excavation of evidence by unskilled personnel.¹⁰ While forensic anthropology has a well-established history and has become increasingly popularised as a result of the media,¹¹ forensic archaeology has only relatively recently emerged as a distinct discipline.

Forensic archaeology (distinct from forensic anthropology¹²) is defined as the application of archaeological field and laboratory techniques within a legal context. Forensic archaeology is concerned with the understanding, recognition, control and interpretation of space, site history, site formation and the context and attributes of (usually) buried features and evidence (artefacts) within a defined area.¹³ In both forensic and traditional archaeology, the goal is to reconstruct the activities of the past (whether the recent or distant past) and to investigate physical remains, whether they are objects, corpses or residues. A traditional concern of archaeologists is burial sites with human remains. This has recently converged with society's growing dismay over genocide to produce an emerging discipline that can be called the forensic archaeology of mass graves.¹⁴

Archaeology has proven itself to be an effective forensic sciences tool both domestically and internationally in North America, Britain and other parts of Europe. Forensic archaeologists have assisted in the investigation of local domestic murder cases¹⁵ and multiple fatalities resulting from natural disasters such as floods, forest fires, earthquakes, etc.,¹⁶ and human induced events such as transportation accidents,¹⁷ building fires,¹⁸ or terrorist incidents.¹⁹

It was not until the mid-1980s that archaeological techniques were used to investigate human rights abuses, augmenting inquiries that had almost entirely depended on witness and victim testimony.²⁰ The first use of archaeological techniques for the investigation of major human rights abuses involving mass killing was in Argentina. Following the return to civilian rule in Argentina in 1983, the newly elected president Raul Alfonsín established the National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP). The aim of this commission was to investigate the more than 10,000 people²¹ who were abducted and murdered during the seven years (1976–83) of military dictatorship under General Jorge Rafael Videla.²²

The initial attempt to exhume unmarked graves was undertaken in an uncontrolled manner by cemetery gravediggers aided by heavy earth-moving equipment.²³ This resulted in a mass of unprovenanced bones lying heaped next to opened graves. Not only had forensic and identification evidence been lost, but also the remains had been seriously mishandled, drawing criticism from the families of the disappeared. In early February 1984, representatives of two human rights groups (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Centre for Social and Legal Studies) met with CONADEP and urged them to seek help from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

In June 1984 a team of forensic scientists went to Argentina for ten days to survey the morgues and cemeteries as a start to assisting the CONADEP with finding the 'disappeared'. This team included the now eminent anthropologist Dr Clyde Snow (then head of the Department of Civil Aeromedical Institute). At the end of their ten-day stay, the team called on the Argentinean government to establish a national forensic centre that could ensure that graves were excavated using archaeological techniques. It was stated that one grave excavated using archaeological techniques would yield more evidence

than several hundred demolished by bulldozers.²⁴ Forensic experts returned to Argentina and continued to work and train local people. As a result of the archaeological investigations, hundreds of individuals were excavated and identified. Snow was able to testify as an expert witness in the trial of the nine Junta members who ruled Argentina during the period of military repression.²⁵ Snow's training of local people resulted in the formation of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense, EAAF).²⁶ The EAAF have subsequently played a significant role in the investigation of human rights abuses world wide.²⁷

Over the past 20 years the United Nations (UN) and human rights organisations such as Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and more recently the International Forensic Centre of Excellence for the Investigation of Genocide (Inforce Foundation) have recruited archaeologists to exhume individual and mass graves associated with investigations of political killings, war crimes and genocide in over a dozen countries worldwide.²⁸ PHR have worked in Iraqi Kurdistan, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia; members of INFORCE have worked in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq, and EAAF have worked in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Iraqi Kurdistan, French Polynesia, Peru, Rwanda, the Republic of South Africa and the former Yugoslavia.²⁹

An historically influential contribution to international forensic archaeology was made in 1990 by Emeritus Professor Richard Wright (Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney) who archaeologically investigated World War II mass graves in the Ukraine on behalf of the Australian government's prosecution of war criminals.³⁰

The creation of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia (1993) and Rwanda (1994) allowed the Chief Prosecutor to field investigative teams that included archaeologists. Exhumations were performed through liaison with the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) from the former Yugoslavia (formed in 1996). In addition, ICMP continues to provide archaeological expertise and personnel to local commissions for missing persons from Bosnia, Croatia and Yugoslavia (now Serbia and Montenegro) which function under the aegis of the local national courts. The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is currently conducting exhumations in Kosovo with assistance from ICMP. While there is some debate about the extent to which the evidence collected has been effectively used to bring about successful prosecution of perpetrators,³¹ the methods used to collect the evidence in these countries noted above have been thorough and systematic to an unprecedented degree.

The Challenge of East Timor

One of the more recently formed countries where archaeology may be able to assist in the investigation of human rights abuses is East Timor. In 1975 Portugal released East Timor from its colonial status which had lasted 400 years. Indonesia promptly invaded and in 1976 declared East Timor to be Indonesia's 27th Province. The international community of nations and concerned individuals supported the people of East Timor in their sustained struggle to regain independence.

Between 1975 and late 1999 it is estimated that more than 200,000 East Timorese were killed, i.e. about a third of the population.³² This is proportionately more than

those who died under Pol Pot's regime of terror in Cambodia. Alleged specific atrocities included:

- The massacre of 60,000 people within six months of the 1975 Indonesian invasion.³³
- On 12 November 1991 Indonesian troops indiscriminately opened fire on a peaceful gathering of people at the Santa Cruz cemetery, in the capital city of Dili, allegedly killing between 50 and 270 individuals. Hundreds more were seriously injured and 250 people went missing.
- In 1999 international pressure forced Indonesia to acquiesce to a referendum on independence. In the months prior to the registration of voters, 50,000 people were displaced by violence and threats from militia. Many individuals disappeared after allegedly being tortured.³⁴
- On 4 September 1999 almost 80 per cent of the East Timorese population voted for independence. Following a few brief hours of euphoria among East Timorese people, pro-Indonesian militia began killing and committing arson attacks resulting in the destruction of 50–70 per cent of buildings in Dili and the forced displacement of up to 200,000 people.
- On 5 September 1999 several hundred people sought refuge in the Suai church but an unknown number were killed by militia. The bodies of 25 individuals, including that of Father Hilario (previously thought to be on a militia death list³⁵), were found in three mass graves in West Timor.³⁶ The remains of Father Hilario and two other priests were transferred to temporary interment near Bishop Belo's residence and have not been subject to autopsy. The other remains were transferred to the Serious Crimes Unit (SCU) of UNMISSET in Dili for autopsy.

On 20 May 2002 the newest country in the world, East Timor, came into being. Since this time, the country has been attempting to investigate the many atrocities committed by the Indonesians (and Indonesian supporters) to consolidate integration and quell resistance prior to independence.³⁷ While the world has been slow to react to the mass violence that occurred during the Indonesian occupation of East Timor,³⁸ now that independence has been obtained, efforts are underway to investigate some of the atrocities. Under the auspices of UNTAET (The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor established on 25 October 1999), the Serious Crime Unit (SCU) has been established to investigate incidences of mass killings and forced deportation as well as individual offences of murder, rape and torture and other crimes against humanity committed in East Timor between 1 January and 25 October 1999.³⁹

While such investigations are an important start to the process of facing East Timor's violent past, the dates encompassed by the mandate need to be critically examined. One can question whether investigation of the purported 1,300 killings of 1999 should take precedence over the far larger number that occurred earlier. Among East Timorese people the Santa Cruz massacre on 12 November 1991 is marked annually as the defining moment in their struggle for independence. Since independence, 12 November has been declared a public holiday in East Timor.⁴⁰ We have focused on this event because of its pivotal social significance. We believe forensic archaeology has an important role to play in recovering victims and, in so doing, to expose the political negligence which has so characterised the history of East Timor.⁴¹

The Santa Cruz Massacre

On 12 November 1991 an estimated 3,000 people⁴² had joined what eyewitness reports described as a peaceful procession to the Santa Cruz cemetery following an early morning memorial mass for Sebastiao (Gomes) Rangel at a local parish church. Rangel had reportedly been killed by Indonesian security forces two weeks earlier (on 28 October 1991) at the same parish church (at Motael) where he and about 20 other political activists had been hiding.

Some members of the procession were reported to have shouted pro-independence slogans and carried a FRETILIN (nationalist movement) flag in an uncharacteristically open defiance of Indonesian authority.⁴³ With no warning given, the Indonesian soldiers shot into the crowd within minutes of it having reached the cemetery. The walls of the cemetery and the large numbers of people made it difficult to escape and the shooting continued even as the people tried to flee.

There are myriad reports issued both by human right groups and by the Indonesian government describing the events following the massacre, the details of which are often contradictory. Estimates of the number killed vary widely (Table 1): the Indonesian government provided a figure of 19 killed,⁴⁴ while various eyewitness accounts put the number at anywhere from 50 to more than 200.⁴⁵

In addition to these original killings, widespread reports exist of executions of witnesses to the massacres on 15, 17 and 18 November and thereafter into December.⁴⁶ An execution site has been named in one unconfirmed report at Alto de Comorro some nine miles west of Dili.⁴⁷ There were also statements about casualties being taken to the Army Hospital (some 500 metres from the cemetery). The day after the massacre the hospital was closed off from visitors and those who were still alive in the hospital were then apparently killed by Indonesian soldiers.⁴⁸ The bodies were then purportedly dumped in unmarked mass graves.

The initial international reaction to the Dili massacre was one of outrage,⁴⁹ augmented by the fact that the event was filmed by the British journalist Max Stuhl. With few exceptions however, by mid-December 1991, governments and governmental organisations had not backed their anger with concrete action.⁵⁰ There was a façade of an inquiry ‘staged’ by the Indonesian government⁵¹ to appease international and domestic criticism of the event.

Table 1. Varying Reports on Numbers Killed, Wounded, Disappeared and Hospitalised

Killed	Wounded	Hospitalised	Disappeared	Source
271	278	103	270	52
273	376		255	53
> 100				54
Dozens				55
50–80				56
< 100				57
19	91			58
c. 50				59
	89	14	Scores	60
50–>200				61
75–200				62
189				63
18			115	64

While human rights groups called for an immediate and impartial investigation into the circumstances of the massacres at Santa Cruz,⁶⁵ including a recommendation for an international team with experienced forensic specialists to investigate the massacre,⁶⁶ nothing was ever followed up. The remains of the victims have never been found; furthermore, the number and location of any mass graves have not been systematically evaluated. The Indonesian authorities admitted that bodies of many who died were immediately buried at an abandoned graveyard outside Dili; a procedure they characterised as ‘the careless handling of those who died’.⁶⁷

A Role for the Forensic Archaeologist

The information provided by eyewitness accounts indicates there is a strong potential for forensic archaeology to be employed to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of protestors participating in the Santa Cruz massacre.

Locating the Gravesite

The first stage in any investigation of a clandestine mass grave involves the search for the gravesite. Using information from eyewitness accounts to direct the search two possible gravesites were determined. Unconfirmed reports of bodies buried in large, but newly dug, unmarked graves outside Dili⁶⁸ make reference to two sites in particular.

One is Hera,⁶⁹ an area on the north-eastern shore of Dili. Reports say 19 bodies were buried at Hera (which may explain how the Indonesian government came up with the number 19),⁷⁰ compared to 36 buried collectively in Hera.⁷¹

The other is Tibar, which is located 8–12 km west of Dili. Tibar was a military base cum firing range known locally as Faiduma.⁷² In an interview in 2000 with the Nobel peace laureate, Jose Ramos-Horta claimed to have a map⁷³ pinpointing the location of two mass graves.⁷⁴ The Australian journalist Dennis Schulz visited Tibar in 1991 and in a published article described the following:

[The] Grave site lies behind the home units of the Indonesian soldiers and their families. The burial pit was exactly where sources reported it to be. Lying in scorched bush land between the Army camp and the rifle range behind it, the cleared area was obvious. The 20 X 20 square meter pit formed the terminus of a short track that led off the main road to the firing range. All vegetation in the area was obliterated or flattened by heavy machinery, with small depressions of surface soil collapsing around the edges, indicating the existence of a large filled-in hole.⁷⁵

The article was accompanied by a photo of the purported gravesite. In 1998, the Jakarta appointed governor at the time, Mr. Mario Carrascalao said he had evidence proving the soldiers executed a truckload of Timorese and buried them at a site on a river (Bemos river) south of Dili, near a rubbish tip.⁷⁶

The alleged site of Tibar was visited by the authors in April 2003. A memorial cross has been erected by local people making it relatively easy to locate. There is no obvious comparability between the journalist’s photo of 1991 and our own, although the profile of the hills in the distance of both figures is similar. Furthermore, we saw no evidence of ‘home

units of Indonesian soldiers and their families in the area' seen by Schulz. While there is an obvious mound of earth at the memorial site, quite possibly the mound was created as a visual backdrop to the cross rather than being the precise location of the site. We are not absolutely confident that the memorial location marks the location of a grave. However, we have to consider the effects of the passage of time of 12 years on vegetation and decomposition of the bodies (as related to its effects on the soil); plus the fact that a nearby river appears to have flooded seasonally depositing large river pebbles.

The area shown to us is in a remote location at the foot of a mountainous area from which issue high-energy rivers that have deposited gravels and cobbles over the area. The water channels look as though they change course easily. The substrate is composed of well-drained coarse gravels in which decomposition would be rapid. Any large pit excavated into these gravels would have indistinct edges and may be overlain by layers deposited through channel changes. Nevertheless, the site is suitable for the implementation of forensic archaeological techniques such as remote sensing, especially resistivity surveying and ground penetrating radar. Systematic surface inspection would also be undertaken in order to assess whether there is any useful (although circumstantial) evidence (such as cartridge cases) outside the possible grave.

Size of the Grave/Estimation of Numbers Killed

In attempting to find the gravesite, it is also useful to consider the potential size of the grave. Eyewitness accounts describe a large pit, about 6 feet (c. 1.8 m) deep and measuring 25 x 30 feet (7.5 x 9 m) in which it was said the dead were buried.⁷⁷ Other estimates of 50 x 50 m have been quoted.⁷⁸ A large open burial pit is alleged to have been waiting for the bodies. The pit was said to be one of seven around Dili that had been dug by the military in an effort to intimidate the East Timorese against any participation in the suggested Portuguese enquiry.⁷⁹

While the reported numbers killed at the massacre may be important for considering size, the differences in reports (see Table 1) may be misleading. While disposal methods and body preservation will affect the size of a grave, it cannot be assumed that large numbers of individuals will require a large grave.⁸⁰

Excavation

Once the grave outline has been identified and exposed, test trenching can proceed to verify the presence of bodies. The occurrence of human remains in a grave does not, however, prove human rights abuses. Careful excavation, recording and recovery may provide evidence of coercion in the form of blindfold and ligatures, and permits corroboration of eyewitness accounts which describe the way the prisoners were made to strip naked, blindfolded and their hands tied behind their backs.⁸¹

Forensic verification of torture is also possible through the use of forensic archaeological techniques.⁸² It is the role of the pathologists and the anthropologists to undertake an analysis of the body once it has been removed from the grave. However, in order to avoid confusion about alterations to the body which may be created as a result of lifting and moving the individual, and to avoid confusion about the relationship of 'evidence' to the body, it is vital that precise archaeological excavation is undertaken (ideally with the anthropologist on site) to enable accurate recording of any alterations to the body

which occurred peri-mortem. Such recording will be vital in the investigation of the Santa Cruz massacre as eyewitness accounts describe weapons used on the victims such as truncheons, butts of automatic weapons, M-16s, knives and bayonets.⁸³ Further, 'soldiers crushed the skulls of the wounded [who were taken to the hospital] with large rocks, ran over them with trucks, stabbed them, and administered – with doctors present – poisonous disinfecting chemicals as medicines to "finish off" scores of wounded demonstrators in the wake of the massacre'.⁸⁴

While excavation involves exposing the bodies so that they may be recorded and then removed from the grave, it also encompasses understanding stratigraphic relationships in order to record subtle features such as machine marks or tyre tracks from transport vehicles. Such evidence has been recovered and used effectively in investigations in Bosnia.⁸⁵ Careful recording of such features may be able to substantiate reports that describe individuals being taken in military trucks from various prisons in Dili to a place on the outskirts of town; two or four trucks were allegedly seen, each carrying dozens of people.⁸⁶ Also, witnesses saw two bulldozers accompanying the seven trucks, which allegedly transported the bodies.⁸⁷ As noted earlier, an execution site at Alto de Comorro has been alleged.

Identifying Victims

One of the main reasons to undertake an investigation of the Santa Cruz massacre is to identify the victims and return them to families. A list of the disappeared gives (where known) the name, age, sex, profession, residence, date/place of disappearance⁸⁸ of some 250 persons. This list is thought to be about 80 per cent accurate.⁸⁹ Ante-mortem information about these individuals will have to be collected. Careful excavation and examination of the physical remains will enable presumptive identification. It is proposed that final identifications be obtained through DNA profiling based on samples taken from the skeletal remains and compared with blood samples from close relatives of the victims.

Given the close biological relationships within the community, many individuals will share genes; consequently a DNA match between blood donors and a tooth or bone sample still require demonstration that the remains and other physical evidence support the identification. Such techniques have had marked success in the identification of victims in Argentina⁹⁰ and the former Yugoslavia⁹¹ as undertaken by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP).⁹²

Political/Humanitarian Will

As has been demonstrated, there is a myriad of useful information that could facilitate an investigation into the Santa Cruz massacre. It is, however, vital that there is local political and humanitarian will for the investigation to be undertaken.

During a preliminary visit to Dili in April 2003 the authors met with advisors to the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) in East Timor to discuss the status of investigation into the Santa Cruz massacre. Representatives of the CAVR (Dr. Gerry van Klinken, Research advisor, and Mr. Hugo Fernandes, Co-ordinator of the Truth Seeking Unit) indicated that resolution in the form of finding the grave/s containing the victims of the Santa Cruz massacre could play an important role in reconciliation for the people of East Timor. Their enthusiasm for pursuing an investigation

was exhibited by the fact that they drove us out to look at the sites of Hera and Tibar (see above).

One of the points that was stressed to us was that the CAVR was not interested in exhumations taking place for the purpose of prosecution. While the lack of prosecution has certainly been typical in other countries said to be 'dealing with the past',⁹³ such a stance in East Timor may reflect a position expressed by the President Xanana Gusmao, who does not consider the International Court or one in East Timor a priority when faced with problems in this period of reconstruction.⁹⁴ An investigation for humanitarian reasons alone is perfectly feasible and supports the notion that the forensic sciences can become an advocate for intervention. As was expressed to the CAVR, one of the professional obligations of the forensic archaeologist is to undertake full and detailed recording while excavating so that the potential for prosecution can always be a future choice for the people of East Timor.

Conclusion

Nearly two years into independence East Timor faces a myriad of economic and legislative problems.⁹⁵ The process of reconciliation has however been initiated and nation building is progressing. For the first time since the Indonesian invasion of 1975, traditional archaeological work has been initiated with the support of East Timorese political leaders. Archaeologists have already found evidence of occupation of the island dating back some 35,000 years,⁹⁶ and have identified cave locations that could be turned into eco-tourist sites.⁹⁷ Forensic archaeology can also play an important role in the process of East Timorese rehabilitation.

It has taken almost 30 years for events pertaining to East Timor to be acknowledged by the major political powers and investigation of some of those events to be initiated. A myriad of reasons, including strategic ties, economic greed, national interest and political dominance resulted in this time delay.⁹⁸ Now that investigations into atrocities have commenced, we need to see that political pressure (mainly exerted by vested interests of industrialised nations) does not again deflect investigation and detract from effective reconciliation.

The CAVR in East Timor has not recommended an investigation into the events of 12 November 1991.⁹⁹ Our meeting with representatives of the Commission has, however, provided the possible opportunity for forensic archaeology to assist in the investigation of human rights abuses and ensure that the victims of the Santa Cruz massacre do not remain just a statistic.¹⁰⁰

While the Santa Cruz massacre cannot be viewed as an isolated incident,¹⁰¹ there are many reasons why pursuing an investigation into the events following the massacre is important. Locating the grave(s) and recovering the victims has the potential to provide some kind of closure about the Santa Cruz 'missing' not only by restoring dignity to the victims, but because such physical evidence will hopefully allow the official denial of the massacre (despite being filmed and broadcast across the world) and its dismissal by many western governments to be confronted. The Santa Cruz massacre should not, through lack of investigation, continue to be ignored and in some instances denied.¹⁰² Exposure of denial is an important part of the reconciliation and rebuilding of East Timor as a stable country.

Many societies that have experienced human rights abuses involving mass killing have survived to form new countries and/or regimes and have had to come to terms with how to acknowledge, punish and/or recover from such events.¹⁰³ There may be no legal prosecution (the effectiveness of which has been called into question¹⁰⁴), or financial compensation, but the outcomes provided by a forensic archaeological investigation may be more powerful in the healing process than an international criminal tribunal, or the current Truth and Reconciliation ceremonies offered by the government, events often involving little more than talk and the symbolic killing of chickens.¹⁰⁵

In 1991, two weeks after the massacre, Australian Senator Gareth Evans gave a speech that downplayed the event so as not to affect the Australian–Indonesian relationship. Later he suggested that the estimated 200 victims of the massacre ‘might simply have gone bush’.¹⁰⁶ Working together with people from the East Timorese Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, forensic archaeologists can help find the evidence to expose such a wilful and politically ignorant comment and take the victims out of the political ‘bush’ and lay them to rest.

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72. Schulz (note 5) p.29.
73. The map was stated to have been sketched by Xanano Gusmao; cf. Murdoch (note 2) who describes Carlos Musthasa (an eyewitness) producing a map of the site.
74. Ramos-Horta said in the interview, 'I would like to go there [to Tibar] with the forensic experts and have these bodies exhumed to ascertain the real extent of the killings' – Collins (note 46).
75. Schulz (note 49) p.29.
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