



Justice for

All

When she's not in the classroom teaching undergraduates about anthropology and forensic sciences, Jaymee Kim, Ph.D., is researching and ruminating about death. Specifically, she is interested in transitional justice as it pertains to mortality precipitated by government actions and wars. The physical, political and emotional effects of mass and unmarked graves, and other improper burials, on survivors and the role of forensic anthropology in those communities as a whole are topics that Kim, an assistant professor of forensic science at the University of Findlay, has been studying for years.

The term "transitional justice" refers to a collection of actions meant to mitigate the harm caused by gross human rights violations that result in such deaths, and to enable survivors to mourn and recover. For example, amnesty, reparations, human remains repatriation, and other community rebuilding efforts can be part of the solution, but each community needs to approach the problems using methods tailored for cultural, religious and social considerations, Kim said. In most, if not all, instances, the situations are multi-layered, systemic and present unprecedented challenges.



# A Nationwide Issue

Due to her masters and doctoral work at the University of Tennessee, Kim has focused on areas in Canada and Uganda, where large population displacements and mass deaths have occurred. While studying anthropology, Kim was one of the first to complete the university’s Disasters Displacement and Human Rights Program, which she characterized as a sub-focus of anthropology. It was through those studies, and via the program’s specialists who had extensive fieldwork, that she developed an interest in the cultural aspects of forensics.

Kim completed graduate research on forensic intervention in Canada, where she focused on the country’s practice of placing Native Americans in residential schools, and whether its transitional justice attempts were having any meaningful and lasting benefit.

“All the way up until the 1990s, Canada was using these boarding schools for Native Americans, and it was basically forced assimilation,” Kim said. “From the 1800s well into the 1900s, they (children) had to dress the same, cut their hair, they couldn’t

speak their own language.” At many of the schools, physical and sexual abuse was occurring as well, she noted. The children’s attendance was government mandated, and there were instances in which officials took the children from their families by force, said Kim. The schools had cemeteries, but didn’t always keep track of burials; some individuals simply disappeared, and an estimated 6,000 children died while at school, Kim said.

“The scope of it is massive. There were over 150 schools, and all of them had cemeteries, and it’s across the whole country,” she said.

## “A Very Pragmatic Problem”

In Uganda, Kim has studied the consequences of the Lord’s Resistance Army insurgency, a decades-long guerrilla war that has been waged and that has caused a widespread humanitarian and human rights crises. Civilian abductions incited the government to create “internally displaced persons camps,” ostensibly for their protection, Kim explained. “But the government didn’t have enough officers there to actually protect them, so they were like sitting ducks

for the guerrilla group. Then, you also had strict curfews where, if you were not in your camp, the military might recognize you as an enemy combatant, so people were getting killed by government officials too.”

When the government began returning the land it had confiscated for the camps, and their accompanying burial grounds, back to farmers, the situation became more complicated.

“If I’m a farmer, I have graves everywhere and I don’t necessarily know where they are. So that’s a problem, a very pragmatic problem,” Kim pointed out.

Additionally, for the Acholi ethnic population that Kim and her University of Tennessee colleagues have been assisting, the mass graves and scattered remains across the Ugandan countryside have been a violation of traditions and rituals that dictate spiritual after-life activity. Therefore, some Acholi have blamed failed crops, various physical illnesses and social ills on what they consider to be improper burial practices.

# Holistic Measures

In both Canada and Uganda, the mixture of Christianity with indigenous sacred beliefs also muddles such social justice efforts.

Some of Kim’s work has included site surveys and gravesite mapping, which can be invaluable not just forensically, but also for the living as part of the healing process. Proof that the graves exist can alone offer validation and a basis for meaningful memorialization.

Kim’s skills and those of the rest of the team also are being used for a more holistic approach that takes into account the emotional aspects of site identification, remains handling and recovery. Therefore, hundreds of interviews with survivors have been conducted, and coordination with nonprofit and government officials has been incorporated.

In Uganda, the team has conducted “two seasons of very active interviewing with over 150 interviews and multiple focus groups,” said Kim. Participants have been asked to provide information on victims and burials, and to offer their thoughts on what can be done moving forward.

Some communities are choosing to be very strategic and forward-thinking when it comes to justice possibilities, she said. For instance, one community mentioned building a school, because all of its schools had been destroyed during the war.

“We’ve identified that, yes, the graves are a problem, and these are some of the problems they’re causing, which other researchers and their findings corroborate. The next phase of what we’re trying to do is some capacity building,” Kim said, in which the team will teach the Ugandan professionals the forensic and anthropological skills to conduct their own research, surveys, excavation and problem solving.

“Uganda doesn’t have any forensic anthropologists. They have forensic pathologists, or medical examiners, but they really don’t know how to deal with this problem of graves,” said Kim. “We’re hoping to

actually train some of the medical people, the pathologists, by introducing them to forensic anthropology and forensic DNA analysis” with the goal of enabling them to create their own forensic intervention team that can address not only the legal aspects, but the cultural, social and emotional impacts as well, she maintained. “That way, they’ll be self-sustaining,” she said.

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“We have these skills, so how can we use them to help empower the people who don’t yet have them, to improve their living conditions and try to work toward meaningful and sustainable change?” Kim asked.

