The Scholar as Human

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Published by Cornell University Press

Castillo, Debra A. and Anna Sims Bartel.
The Scholar as Human: Research and Teaching for Public Impact.

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Chapter 5

Forgotten Faces, Missing Bodies

Understanding “Techno-Invisible” Populations and Political Violence in Peru

JOSÉ RAGAS

José Ragas investigates the emergence of the global biometric system in postcolonial societies and the current implementation of ID cards as a mechanism designed to grant citizenship and curb the legacy of gender, age, and racial discrimination imposed by similar technologies in the past. In his doctoral dissertation he examined the genealogy of the identification system in postcolonial Peru, arguing that the implementation of certain techniques and devices (fingerprints, mug shots, and identity cards) reinforced archaic social structures that enabled policy makers and technocrats to extract resources from citizens via the imposition of individual identities. His research also shows how citizens turned those technologies into generators of social and political rights, empowering them and allowing them to gain official recognition. In an era of heightened concern over state surveillance, Ragas’s work offers vital reminders of the human and social agendas behind the invention of such technologies: to be counted, literally; to be found among a nation of others and recognized as yourself.

After completing a position as a lecturer at Yale, Ragas took up a position as professor at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, where he is pursuing new work focused on the transnational circulation of biometrics and other technologies of identification during the long Cold War and their dissemination in contexts of political violence and struggle for civil rights.
In mid-2015, an announcement that an international forensic team had reconstructed the “true” faces of two of the most popular Peruvian saints was welcomed by an enthusiastic group of believers and commentators alike.\(^1\) The “new” appearances of both Santa Rosa de Lima and San Martín de Porras were received amid crowded religious ceremonies in Lima that coincided with the anniversaries of their deaths (August for Santa Rosa, November for San Martín de Porras). Before the binational team of Brazilian and Peruvian experts could generate a full tridimensional image of the faces through photogrammetry, they examined the skulls of both saints to obtain information about their physical features. Despite the technology’s novelty and despite enthusiasm for the outcome, the digital reconstructions of both Peruvian saints did not significantly differ from other representations of the saints that had circulated for centuries. As one of the experts reluctantly acknowledged, San Martin de Porras’s 3D reconstruction looked very similar to an anonymous old painting of the saint. Even the particular form of his jaw, which experts attributed to his continuous effort while chewing due to his lack of teeth, was present in the old portrait long before 3D reconstruction was imagined (Correo 2015). The prior of the Convent of Santo Domingo, where San Martin de Porras spent his life, did not hide his disappointment with the digital reconstruction: “It is not suggestive or artistic” (Correo 2015). But if these “new” faces did not change our knowledge of those characters, what triggered the enthusiasm?

The fervor to apply identification technology to specific figures of the past—as in the case of the reconstructed faces of both San Martín and Santa Rosa—may obscure the existence of a significant number of individuals whose faces and identities remain unknown to us. Just few months after the new faces of both saints were unveiled to the public, President Ollanta Humala signed the Ley de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas on June 22, 2016, as part of an official initiative to coordinate efforts meant to “design, establish, execute, and supervise” the search of national citizens who disappeared during Peru’s era of political violence (1980–2000). Since the 1980s, a multifarious group of human rights activists, forensic scientists, and relatives have struggled to recover the remains of their beloved ones killed by state forces and terrorist groups, identify their remains, bury them, and attempt to end their grieving that has lasted nearly three decades for some. These groups have conjured both traditional and innovative strategies and technologies (e.g., forensic science and DNA analysis) to match the remains, bones, and DNA of the victims with their families and assign them an identity. Although technology and forensic science has been crucial to restoring some of the victims’ identities and bringing some comfort to relatives, the enormous
challenge remains of attaining justice for them and the hundreds of bodies that are still buried in clandestine sites (Cardoza 2016).

**Bringing Back Invisible Populations through ID Technology**

This essay offers an exploratory alternative to study the contentious relationship between identification technology and “techno-invisible populations.” By “techno-invisible population” I mean a heterogeneous group of people who, for different reasons, have been or continue to be undetected by national identification systems and the technologies deployed to apprehend their existence over the last two centuries. National governments invested significant resources in building infrastructure, training experts, and designing artifacts to confer individual identities to citizens by capturing their faces, personal information, and fingerprints and inserting that information in digital and written databases and identity documents. Governments have made advances in the design and implementation of this particular technology, as witnessed by police departments’ efforts to create lists of suspects and more recent and ambitious projects like Aadhaar in India, where one billion citizens are expected to receive a unique identification number. Wendy Hunter and Robert Brill assert that in Latin America these efforts have allowed registration of children younger than five years old to expand from 82 percent to 91 percent between 2000 and 2012 (Hunter and Brill 2016, 206). If we look at other regions, we will encounter similar projects whose ultimate goal is to incorporate vulnerable populations into national records.

Peru is part of this global trend of civil registration, and in the last years it has positioned itself as a regional leader in biometric and identification technology. Anyone familiar with Peru’s recent history will be surprised to observe the transformation of a country with alarming high rates of undocumented people to one that is fully capable of providing an identity document (Documento Nacional de Identidad) to every citizen. An ambitious campaign carried out in the last two decades by RENIEC (Registro Nacional de Identificación y Estado Civil), the official entity in charge of identification, covered the territory in the coastal area, the highlands, and the Amazon, granting personal documents and curbing the number of unregistered national citizens. In addition, RENIEC expanded the original scope of ID card holders to include children, as a way to protect them from kidnapping and human trafficking.

My aim here is not to downplay the impressive accomplishments achieved by RENIEC or any of its global counterparts in providing identity cards to
national citizens worldwide. Over the last few years, and during fieldwork for my dissertation, I spoke with officers at RENIEC and found professionals committed to curbing the number of undocumented people. Although there is cause to celebrate that more national citizens (especially children, senior citizens, and women) are receiving material proof of their existence, this essay seeks to look beyond this optimism and insist that the presence of an undocumented population is a problem that is far from being extinguished. What I propose here is to focus on those individuals and groups who for different reasons lack a proper identity document, in order to highlight the fissures in the identification systems and possible ways to close them. While counterarguments insist the undocumented population represents a small fraction of the total number of citizens, I argue that their enduring presence is a powerful and disturbing reminder of how governments, technology, and society foster the reproduction and perpetuation of individuals without proper documents.

There are a constellation of reasons why individuals lack an identity card or are unregistered with the state, reasons we have just begun to understand. It is difficult to encompass all of these cases under a single category, thus I will use the term “techno-invisible populations” for didactic and pragmatic purposes. As I demonstrate in my research, some populations were systematically excluded from having personal documents since they did not fit in the restrictive model of citizenship envisioned by postcolonial policy makers in the Andes who deliberately excluded women, poor people, and indigenous peoples from obtaining a voting identity card (Ragas 2020). In addition, becoming invisible to the system does not necessarily occur in remote areas or in the historical past. For instance, in the 2010s in the United States, the Republican Party pushed for the strict enforcement of the voter ID laws that obliged US citizens to present a photo ID in order to register to vote. Hundreds or thousands of people could not provide such proof and were prevented from voting in the 2016 national election. Not surprisingly, the majority of those belonged to minority groups. Alongside these scenarios, we should also consider groups that have never been contacted or are considered floating urban groups, like homeless people. Wars and natural disasters have also produced a high number of refugees and immigrants whose status represents a limbo for the host countries and local authorities.

Studying the roots of populations that exist “outside” the system poses both logistical and methodological challenges to researchers. Given the exploratory nature of this paper, my principal aim here is to revisit the history of identification technology by focusing on those who were not exposed to a certain type of devices (identity cards) and infrastructure (national
identification systems) and who were deliberately neglected by experts and policy makers. In order to do so, I will focus on the case of the Peruvian nationals who were labeled “disappeared” during the internal armed conflict that ravaged the country between 1980 and 1992, and the ensuing difficulties in restoring one’s identity given the lack of official documents. I aim to highlight the various strategies developed by relatives, authorities, and activists to circumvent the lack of official records and assign an identity to the victims or to their remains. Government efforts to reopen cases against the perpetrators and carry out exhumations represent an important step toward correcting the inadequate attention that the state and society gave to the victims and their relatives. That those largely affected are from an indigenous background helps explain the neglect and the lukewarm reception of the media toward the cases, burial rituals, and even trials, as Isaias Rojas-Perez has noted in a recent book (2017a).

By the time Shining Path was pushed back to the jungle and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (another terrorist group inspired by 1960s guerrillas) had been defeated after their leaders were imprisoned or killed, Peru was transitioning from an authoritarian civil regime under Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000) to democracy under a president elected by the Congress of Peru, Valentin Paniagua (2000–2001). In his short tenure, President Paniagua created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to investigate the causes of the political violence and obtain recommendations to prevent them from happening again. The final report presented by the TRC in August 2003 is one of the most important and disturbing documents in the history of the country. One of its most shocking revelations was the estimated number of victims: 69,280 citizens killed by terrorists or the military. A significant number of these casualties had a specific profile: they were indigenous, Quechua speakers, poor and illiterate, and resided in the region of Ayacucho. The number of disappeared according to the final report was 4,000, but this figure was contested in 2011 by the Central Register of Victims (CRV), which had been receiving testimonies and collecting evidence since the 1980s. For the CRV, the number of people disappeared was 8,661. Finally, the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances added another estimate: “between thirteen thousand and sixteen thousand” (Rojas-Perez 2017b).

Disappeared citizens constitute a haunting presence not only in Peru but also throughout Latin America. Traditionally associated with the brutal military regimes that emerged in the Southern Cone and persecuted political opponents in the 1970s and 1980s, cases like the Colombian victims of the attack to the Palace of Justice in 1985 and the forty-three students who
vanished in Ayotzinapa, Mexico, in September 2014, suggest that disappearances are neither confined to the Cold War nor to the military or civilian nature of a political regime. The search for justice for the disappeared questions the governments’ democratic credentials and puts pressure on their existing efforts to find the remains. The ways in which Latin Americans remember the disappeared forms part of their national identity, though this commitment and degree varies from country to country. Therefore, “Una historia necesaria” (“A Necessary Story”), a 2017 Chilean TV production based on testimonies from victims and relatives, was aired on the anniversary of Augusto Pinochet’s coup and presented short stories of arrested Chileans whose bodies were never recovered. In Colombia, one victim of the failed assault on the Palace of Justice in 1985 who had been buried in a common grave was identified as Héctor Jaime Beltrán Fuentes. While I was writing this essay, Argentinians had mobilized consistently in both the public sphere and social media to demand the appearance of the activist Santiago Maldonado.

Documents and Political Violence: A Personal Approach

For those of us who grew up in 1980s Peru amid hyperinflation and political violence, the tension between exposure and invisibility was part of our daily struggle. Our adult lives were made official by ID cards made of thin paperboard, fragile and easily damaged, and possession of these could determine our fate in a highly militarized and violent milieu. Military patrols combed the cities, halting men and women, young and old, asking for papers and discerning whether people looked like potential subversives. Sometimes a bribe could do more than a proper ID card to avoid detention. For those who lacked one or another, their destiny was jail or worse. Throughout the twelve years of political violence in the country, identity documents, personal papers, and identification practices became part of the war itself, and they constitute an overlooked aspect of how Peruvians navigated their escapes from both terrorist groups and the military by masking their own identities or making themselves visible by taking advantage of their social privileges.

In retrospect, it still strikes me how just a simple and ill-designed rectangular piece of cardstock could determine the fate of many of my fellow nationals for such a long time. Identity cards served as virtually the only material proof of a complicated relationship between individuals and the state, and, by extension, between civil existence and nonexistence. One of my personal rituals every time I visit my parents in Lima is to spend some time looking at the multiple personal ID cards I keep in a drawer in my
former bedroom. ID cards and conference badges are mixed among photo
carnets, debit cards, business cards, and even an expired passport with the
Schengen visa stamped on it. It is not difficult to observe the material evolu-
tion of such artifacts. Light cardstock was replaced by laminated plastic, and
simple typography gave way to complex fonts not as easy to forge. Perhaps
because I don’t fear documents anymore (or perhaps because I do, especially
with the most recent developments and the return of the Far Right), I usually
carry more than one in my wallet.

In essence, we are documented organisms. Documents have accompanied
us for a very long time, and we cannot imagine our own lives without them,
regardless of their size, shape, or implications. Documents serve to authen-
ticate our changing identities as organisms who are constantly evolving. This
is an illusion, of course, since no single kind of identification device has been
failsafe. However, our own nature forces us to believe in such an illusion
in order to organize civil society and avoid chaos. If modern societies have
been built upon this assumption, it is then urgent not only to revisit the
genealogy of such devices and institutions but also to rethink the ultimate
consequences of such techno-social foundations and how it has affected peo-
ple in different times and places.

Over the last years, my personal and professional efforts have been devoted
to studying the lives of vulnerable populations through their identification
practices and artifacts. As a historian of technology, my first impulse was to
trace such populations through written and visual records and the artifacts
these individuals and groups engaged with in order to provide a valid iden-
tification to other parties. Nonetheless, very rapidly I realized that the con-
ventional frameworks used to reconstruct human-artifact interaction in the
past were insufficient to capture the complexity of identification and social
identities. My professional training had involved reverence for print sources
and embracing archives as the quintessential place to find those figments
of the past. When I began doing research for my dissertation in Peruvian
archives and online repositories, I soon came to realize that personal docu-
ments themselves were rare. Was this because individuals kept them with
themselves? Or because documents were not the primary way to identify
populations in postcolonial Peru? To make things worse, the extraordinary
expansion of identity cards after 2000 was an obstacle to understanding how
Peruvians identified themselves in the past. In order to assess the intricate
trajectory of identification in postcolonial Peru, I needed a new perspective
and to learn new methodological frameworks and evidence.

The Mellon Seminar provided the space, skills, and resources to explore
these new avenues while I worked on a book manuscript. My decision to
pursue a postdoctoral fellowship in an area (science and technology studies) different from my doctoral education (history of Latin America) proved to be the right call. The interdisciplinary nature of science and technology studies and the solid reputation of the Department of Science and Technology Studies at Cornell were both a challenge and a motivation to keep pushing the once compartmentalized analysis of the history of identification. While I reinvented myself as an STS scholar, the Mellon Seminar was a place where I could complement my research by absorbing inquiries and preoccupations with friends from other disciplines. The weekly meetings were a stimulating space to bring and discuss our doubts and inquiries.

For what I envisioned as my book project to develop during the seminar, the challenge was threefold. Firstly, I had to approach biometrics and identification in an analog era prior to the arrival of fingerprints, mug shots, and modern identity cards. For some researchers, identification can be examined only from this perspective, which has led to focus on a single institution: the police. I decided not to take this approach and to go back at least half a century prior to the advent of such innovations. My point of departure was the Peruvian War of Independence, in order to study the transition from colonial practices inherited from the Spanish rule in the Andean region since the sixteenth century. As I demonstrated, there was a rich and vibrant set of practices and artifacts that were embraced and rejected by colonial subjects long before modern technology.

Secondly, by deliberately disrupting the temporal arc and not starting in the mid-nineteenth century I learned more about the role of technology. Biometrics and the adoption of sophisticated methods might have helped authorities to identify citizens, but in the end these brought negative consequences for the majority of the population, especially in a postcolonial setting. Identity cards became more professional, but they were used to watch fellow nationals and to reinforce colonial structures based on racial hierarchies. Until the 2000s, these papers were not available to everyone; they were limited mostly to male, urban, literate, and “white” citizens. Their selective use created an invisible barrier between the coastal areas and the highlands, depriving the right to vote to those of indigenous descent, a legacy that was barely curbed in the late 1970s, when a new identity document, designed for the illiterate population, was issued by the government.

The final challenge seems to be how to move beyond the nation-state framework. Fortunately, the interdisciplinary nature of the seminar made it easy to learn from the multiple areas studied by its participants by inserting the Peruvian case onto a global stage. There is a tendency among scholars to emphasize the “peculiarity” of our own cases or to introduce them as part
of perennial “peripheries.” I disagree with this approach. Yet there are some peculiarities in the Peruvian case, such as how humans and societies dealt with identities and recognition in cases of political violence many decades ago.

For most Peruvians throughout the twentieth century, our lives gravitated toward two specific documents: the Libreta Militar (or military card) and the Libreta Electoral (or national identity card). Obtaining the military card in the 1980s was a rite of passage. Once we approached our eighteenth birthday (the legal age of adulthood in Peru), we had to approach the local military headquarters. The procedure was humiliating, to say the least. We had to wait for long hours under the sun, and then we were mistreated by the occasional clerk. Despite our concern obtaining the Libreta Militar, this was a necessary evil in the process of becoming citizens and discouraging unnecessary attention from the army. The military nature of Peruvian citizenship—a distortion from the liberal idea of “armed citizenship” that emerged in the early years of the Republic—was present through the numerous raids led by local caudillos to increase the number of soldiers in the barracks. When military service became mandatory, the military card was used to separate those who has already passed through the barracks from those who could be arrested and dispatched to the barracks without any notice or justification. This somber exercise also reinforced the hierarchy of the officials and the armed forces over civil authorities and the government, especially in those areas where the state had been historically absent, such as certain parts of the highlands and the Amazon.

The Libreta Electoral, on the other hand, was the civil counterpart to the military card. It granted political rights to its bearer, like the right to vote in presidential and municipal elections. Yet, like the Libreta Militar, it embodied a long history of inequality and segregation. It was created in 1931 amid the “perfect storm” of the Great Depression, the collapse of the government, and the rise of populist parties in Peru. The political and economic crisis led to the reorganization of the electoral system, which proposed the Libreta Electoral as the cornerstone of such reform. The pressure for mass parties contributed to its vast dissemination on the eve of a presidential election in 1931. Over the next sixty-five years, until it was replaced by a new ID card, the Libreta Electoral reigned as the primary proof of identity among Peruvians. Nonetheless, many did not hold the card, thus remaining invisible to the government on the brink of the violence unleashed by the Shining Path and the military in 1980.

It is not surprising that I have vivid recollections of how I got my Libreta Militar but none at all of receiving my Libreta Electoral. Getting the latter was a simple matter that entailed going to an obscure governmental office
when we turned eighteen. Our major concern pertaining to that document was to protect it from being ruined. Meanwhile, obtaining the Libreta Militar, was a traumatic and abusive experience that is impossible to forget. Fortunately, that process is now extinct.

The Disappeared of Peru

In May 1980, the Shining Path, one of a myriad of radical groups that emerged in the upheaval of the preceding decade, announced the beginning of armed struggle against the Peruvian state. For the next twelve years, the Shining Path orchestrated a vast number of attacks against civilians, political leaders, and military and police officers, dragging the entire country into a bloodbath until the capture of its leader, Abimael Guzmán, known as Comrade Gonzalo, in an upper-class neighborhood in the capital city. During the initial stage of the conflict, the state proved to be ineffective against the rise of the Shining Path. In the early 1980s, President Fernando Belaúnde Terry (1980–85) irresponsibly dismissed terrorists as a band of thieves (abigéos) before he realized this mistake and declared a state of emergency in the southern highlands, which led the military to replace the police and take control of large portions of territory, deepening the intensity of the conflict. The Shining Path, on the other hand, was committed to a total war in order to create a “new” society following the destruction of the existing institutions and the state. Inspired by Maoism, terrorists carried out their own version of a cultural revolution in the Andes, which ultimately led to their defeat, leaving behind a legacy of victims and desolation.

After the army took control of the operations against the Shining Path in the southern highlands in 1983, Ayacucho was suddenly populated by soldiers and officers dispatched to the region to contain the terrorist group. The army also set up detention and interrogation centers. Not surprisingly, the number of those disappeared and victims rose abruptly after this. Bodies began to appear with visible signs of torture. Relatives approached human rights organizations as well as the military headquarters asking for their sons, daughters, and parents. To avoid any tangible proof that could incriminate them, the military destroyed the bodies, incinerating them in crematories, like the one built inside Los Cabitos, an infamous army headquarters in Ayacucho. In other cases they heaped the bodies in the botaderos (dumps) that appeared in the region, waiting for vultures to make them unrecognizable or for them to decompose. When Shining Path perpetrated similar crimes, they exposed their victims so everybody could see the signs displayed over the inert bodies, signs accusing them of being military
informers (Hatun Willakuy 2014, 268). For relatives, it became a painful routine to visit these places and try to recognize the faces or clothes of their loved ones among the disposed bodies.

When the recognition of human features was impossible owing to the state of the body, clothes were a decisive marker to use in identification (Torres 2017). The exhumations conducted in Los Cabitos led to the recovery of clothes and belongings from those who had been detained, tortured, and then executed in that army base. The investigation determined that President Alan Garcia’s visit to Ayacucho in mid-1985 pushed military chiefs to incinerate approximately 500 bodies buried at the base. Experts determined that the remains found there belonged to 109 bodies, but only five have been fully identified so far. In order to contribute to their identification, clothes and other items were displayed in Lima in September 2014 (Fowks 2014). Fragments of shirts, jerseys, shoes, and underwear constituted the macabre collection of remains exhibited to relatives (Castro 2017). Along with clothing, other objects were retrieved from those clandestine sites, such as combs, coins, belts, and even a notebook. It is moving to note how ordinary objects ended up serving as ultimate identifiers of their owners when other methods were not available. For some families, these objects act as representations of missing kin and thus provide some comfort despite the troubling circumstances.

In a few cases, the only tangible proof of existence of the victims was a foto carnet (passport photo). These small fotos carnet were very popular in the country throughout the twentieth century. With the increasing availability of cameras and the demand for an affordable portrait, more people gained access to black-and-white passport photos. As a first step toward their dissemination, these photos moved beyond the confined spaces of police stations and photographic studios, with itinerant photographers key in their availability. Given the nomadic nature of these traveling photographers, tracing their biographies or professional activities is very difficult. Still, their presence has been noted in small towns in the highlands, where villagers lined up as they waited for their turn to be photographed, posing for the camera with a light blanket serving as an improvised background. We also find these photographers in urban areas, especially in public spaces, offering portraits to bystanders. These photos were cherished by their bearers, who often annotated the date and place where they were taken. Sometimes they were sent to loved ones in the letters that went back and forth between the capital city and hometowns. Ultimately someone kept these photographs, which formed part of their personal archives. It is likely that the subjects did not imagine when they commissioned these photos that
their relatives would one day use them not only to remember them but also to help find and identify their remains.

The lack of a portrait or a photograph meant less exposure and visibility for the victim’s relatives who sought justice. And the amount of time that had transpired between August 1985, when a group of sixty-seven peasants was massacred by a military patrol in the town of Accomarca, and the 2000s, when the investigation was reopened, contributed to the deterioration of the few existing images of the victims. The attack against this community was particularly brutal. Lieutenant Telmo Hurtado led the raid against the comuneros, taking them from their homes and locking them—including twenty children—in three cabins and then ordering his subordinates to burn the cabins and to kill any potential witnesses. The case was reopened in 2002, and by then the portraits of the victims were hard to distinguish. While their families fought to have the case reopened, the images of their beloved ones were rapidly vanishing. Furthermore, not all of the victims had photographs, and when they were readily available it was difficult to enlarge the size of the small fotos carnet. Hence the possession of a photograph took an unexpected additional value: not only to remember the victims but also to secure their relatives a privileged position in press conferences. As journalist Jonathan Castro (2017) contends, without these images, families’ demands for justice were “less visibilized,” and those without a photograph were moved to a back row in their interviews with reporters and the media.

The relatives of Benedicta Quispe Martinez were among those who had to cede their spot to those holding a photograph. The only visual testimony they had of Benedicta was a poor-quality image found in a local electoral record. The photograph barely shows a face and some facial features (see fig. 5.1). In 2016, Jesús Cossio, a Peruvian artist who had documented the years of political violence in two acclaimed graphic novels (Rupay and Barbarie), attended the public hearings and committed himself to assisting the relatives in restoring the faces of their loved ones killed in Accomarca. Cossio sketched portraits of the disappeared based on photos relatives provided. In other cases, where photographs were not available, he used photos of relatives to reconstruct certain physical features that described the victims. In the cases of individual children, Cossio sought inspiration in photographs portraying other children of Ayacucho. Working in tandem with relatives and their organizations was key to correcting the initial sketches. The final portraits were given to the families in February 2017 in a ceremony attended by the Ministry of Justice.
Lacking material evidence of the victims, whether an identity card, a photograph, or any other visual reminder, along with the absence of the bodies, altered social cultural practices associated with mourning, grieving, and burial during and after the conflict. As noted, not being able to show a photo of a disappeared person could undermine the public exposure of a case and relatives’ ability to gain justice. On a more personal level, not having a body to mourn and bury changed the dynamics of death rituals in the Peruvian southern highlands, a profoundly religious area. Heavy coffins once carried atop shoulders by four or more people from the church to the cemetery were replaced by the carrying of small and light boxes, like the one containing the remains of Mr. Feliciano Huamaní, killed by the Shining Path in 1984 and buried by his son Feliciano (Luna Amancio 2017; Llakiy Times 2017). When neither bodies nor even remains have been recovered, rituals, such as the changing of clothes and the subsequent funeral service, cannot be performed properly. Even worse, during the height of the violence, burials were banned by the authorities, hence families had to perform inadequate burials (malos entierros) that impeded families’ ability to deal with the pain and haunted them for the ensuing years (Hatun Willakuy 2014, 268).
CHAPTER 5

Epilogue

This chapter shows the social and cultural impact of disappeared populations in a post-conflict area like the southern highlands in Peru. As this case demonstrates, the relationship between technology and “invisible” populations is way more complex than the possession (or not) of an identity document. As I aimed to demonstrate here, the undocumented nature of an individual or a group should be a point of departure to investigate the genealogy of such exclusions and how the mechanisms that prevented them from obtaining proof of identity continue to operate and block them from achieving full rights and participation. The investigation of identification and invisible populations urges us to rethink the history of identification and reexamine the sources and methodologies we have been using. In doing so, we need to descend into the most obscure regions of the human past, to learn about the victims of political violence, genocide, and, most recently, terrorist attacks and figure out how we can contribute to the restoration of their histories and identities. Technology has proved to be a formidable tool in assigning identities to bodies exposed to such inhuman acts, and new methods and advances will certainly help identify other victims, posing new challenges for experts, scholars, and relatives, as Jay D. Aronson (2016) suggests in his book on Ground Zero and the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In other cases, where such episodes of mass death took place in areas with a high percentage of undocumented people, it is necessary to complement forensic science to explain why such persons lived outside the scope of the large systems of which they were a part. We must examine how those same systems continue to exclude or overlook groups, making them more vulnerable to violence and poverty in the near future.

Note

1. Many friends and colleagues contributed to this chapter. I want to thank Debra Castillo and Anna Sims Bartel for organizing the Mellon Diversity Seminar at Cornell and also thank the fantastic group of scholars who participated. Patricia Palma, Griselda Jarquin, and Valérie Robin Azevedo read an early version and gave excellent feedback. Jesús Cossio kindly shared his material and allowed me to reproduce one of his works.

Works Cited


