

The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations. By Jessica Auchter. London and New York: Routledge, 2014. Pp. 175. US\$130.00 hardback.

To mourn a death when the body is absent, or when a body is present but not identified, is to challenge the most basic of human expectations. At a human level, the very present absence of the body of a dead loved one challenges the ability to mourn and deepens the traumatizing impact of violent death on surviving family members and others. Such uncertainties over death and the status of bodies challenge the dichotomous classification of present versus absent. At the social level, deaths without bodies and bodies without names create challenges for the construction of shared meanings around such ambiguous loss, asking questions of how to memorialise such absence and challenging any effort to represent it. At a political level, both the bodies of the dead and the absence of such bodies have long been used to drive narratives that serve a range of purposes and that have been included in the mechanisms and calculations of state power. More than simple killing however, such disappearance confronts those affected by it with the power of perpetrators: the power to not only deny life, but to define how that life and death are remembered. The missing, situated as they are between life and death, assume a power of their own, something familiar made unfamiliar as a result of political calculation.

Auchter's book begins from the fact that the absence of a body or the presence of an unidentified body challenges the life/death dichotomy. She engages with what perspectives on the dead body imply for the construction of political subjectivity and seeks to explore representations of such phenomenon from the perspective of the ghostly, defining their impact as 'haunting', and seeking to construct an ethnography of the ghostly. Auchter sees haunting as ontology, because the state is haunted by the political significance of dead bodies: dead bodies permit examination of the links between the material and the spectral. She references Jacques Derrida's *hauntology*, and even talks of a 'spectral turn' in the humanities and social science.

Auchter's interest is the politics of memory around such complicated loss, how it serves as a demonstration of power and of the ability of the state to exercise control over individual life, using the lens of biopolitics. The bodies of the missing and the dead represent a space of conflict between different interests, including power, knowledge and the sacred. To understand the politics of such bodies is to interrogate the contestation around how these bodies and these deaths are represented, what to remember and how. The book addresses three case studies: memorials and mass graves relating to the Rwandan genocide, monuments to irregular migrants who died trying to cross the Mexican-US border, and the dead from the 9/11 attacks on New York City.

The Rwandan case study leads Auchter to engage with the horrors not only of the genocide but also of the efforts to memorialize it, including through the display of bones and even the preserved bodies of its victims. This in itself – traditionally shocking to Rwandans – shows how such extreme events reshape representations. Auchter by and large chooses not to engage with the tension between the body as evidence of crime (the rhetoric of truth and justice) and the body as a reference point for mourning and the addressing of trauma (the rhetoric of memory). However, in Rwanda it is precisely an effort to display the evidence of the genocide that drives memorialisation, accompanied by a political effort to support the current regime's rhetoric of

denying ethnicity in favour of a Rwandan identity. The fact that the displayed bones are unnamed emphasizes that their individuality is sacrificed – victims are killed twice, both in body and in name (70). The political significance of the dead is precisely in the anonymous scale of their number, reproducing the biopolitics of the genocide itself. Auchter describes Rwandans as seeing the role of remembering as being simply not to forget, challenging Jay Winter's understanding that the role of a memorial is precisely to permit the "necessary art of forgetting" (1998) that being denied access to a body prevents.

The border monuments to dead would-be migrants at the Mexican-US border confirm a theme that runs through the book, namely the ungrievability of the dead: the lack of value assigned to them in death echoes that denied them in life. The 'Juan Doe' cemeteries in American border towns testify to this, as anonymous migrant graves marked only by a single brick contrast with the well-kept grassy monuments to the local named dead. The securitisation discourse that drives US border policy – and leads directly to migrant deaths - represents a 'state of exception' in which sovereign power decides which lives matter. Auchter believes that memorialization can challenge this, and that the ghosts that haunt the border can contest the notions of the bounded citizen-subject. She turns to art to do this, looking at a number of works which seek to unsettle how migrants are perceived whilst commemorating their lives and deaths. She calls this *counter memorialisation*, an explicit effort to commemorate absence. Perhaps the most interesting is a sculpture that sought to sustain migrants by providing water in the desert, but also encouraged them to leave their mark by writing on it. Depressingly, the piece was repeatedly destroyed by those who saw it as challenging a dominant political perception.

Counter memorialisation, the idea of memorializing absence, is developed further in the chapter discussing the dead of the 9/11 attacks. Discussion of such counter memorials begins with the discarded shoes and clothes of Holocaust victims, and includes a range of disappearing monuments premised on the understanding that an absence provides the best medium for meditation and healing. Auchter summarises the debates around the 9/11 memorial, which ultimately became driven by the desire to identify and name the victims, resonating with the mutation of US policy towards its dead soldiers across the 20th century from celebrating the symbol of the unknown soldier to ensuring the dead, and all remains, returned to be identified. This narrative seems to emerge from the understanding that forensic identity restores personhood (Wagner, 2008). Auchter also discusses how the rubble of the twin towers itself became sacralised, both because human remains were inseparable from the dust of the buildings and because the site of 'ground zero' represents precisely the absence that defines the counter memorial.

The book represents a fascinating overview of how memory and the dead body have intersected politically in the three contexts discussed, but perhaps fails to deliver on the broader theme of 'haunting', particularly in its claim to investigate issues of political subjectivity. There is a distinct absence of understanding of the subjectivities of those most affected by the deaths discussed here, namely the families of the victims. In the Rwanda chapter for example, Auchter quotes more foreigners than Rwandans, questioning the extent to which her understanding of the representations she discusses is embedded in the cultures from which they emerge. Despite this critique, this book is a genuine contribution to discussions about memory and

memorialisation after violence and mass death, offering a critical and theoretical insight that can both steer scholarship in novel directions and potentially inform practice.

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Wagner, Sarah E. (2008) *To know where he lies: DNA technology and the search for Srebrenica's Missing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Winter, Jay (1998) *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: the Great War in European cultural history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.