

Finn Stepputat (ed.), *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2014, 256 pp., £70 hardback).

This rather pioneering edited volume explores how states and non-state political communities claim sovereignty and govern living populations by controlling and using dead bodies. Interrelating theoretical insights and empirical findings, the volume thus seeks to understand the relationship between sovereignty and human remains. Reviewing edited volumes is always somewhat challenging, especially when the different contributions discuss the subject matter through multiple case studies, each with its own relevant, fascinating perspective. I believe the reader will best be served in this case by a mostly descriptive survey of the remarkably valuable riches presented in the volume. This being noteworthy given that, at first glance, people who are not familiar with the subject may wrongly wonder what there is in fact to say about such a grim matter, suspecting discussions to merely indulge and dwell on perverse pornographic anecdotes. As this volume well shows, a detailed study of the constitution and practice of sovereignty through the way dead bodies are treated, framed and experienced has meaningful implications and relevance for a wide array of subjects in the social sciences and the humanities.

The volume sketches the intricate contours of the subject matter in itself as well as exemplify an exceptionally wide variety of case studies. These range from Argentina via Guatemala and Mexico all the way to Mongolia and Vietnam. Assembling together contributors from Europe, North America, Asia and Africa the volume is a highly convincing presentation of the truly global and multilayered nature of the issue. The volume opens up a field of inquiry: posing questions; suggesting insights; exploring the ways the issue is embedded in the social and political reality of the case studies. It aims at inspiring further scholarship, proving the still unexplored terrains hiding behind our current aversion towards the subject, indeed treating these very aversions as part of the issue explored.

The first chapter by the volume's editor, Finn Stepputat of the Danish Institute for International Studies, is a comprehensive theoretical introduction of the subject matter. The chapter puts forward an impressively sophisticated yet readable

theoretical discussion of the relations between dead bodies and sovereignty. The discussion outlines four major theoretical perspectives that Stepputat rightly identifies to be the most productive analytical tools for the subject at hand. The four are:

1. a psychoanalytic analysis of the fear of death;
2. a politico-theological framework utilising the concepts of liminality, sacralisation and desecration, taboo and transgression;
3. a foucauldian analysis of bio-politics and necro-politics;
4. a Latour inspired discussion of the agency of dead bodies.

Stepputat appears to be aiming at providing the reader a tool kit with which to work, a language to speak a subject usually left unspoken, ideas to inspire further inquiries. In this regard these four theoretical axis structure a space of discussion and analysis. They are distinct dimensions of the phenomenon rather than competing perspectives or analytical claims. Stepputat, however, does not suggest a theoretical synthesis, harmonising the various conflicting elements within these four axis. Indeed he aims at laying the ground, proving there is plenty to be examined, now awaiting further elaboration and empirical study.

Though the volume's main recurring theme is naturally the intricate politics of burial and commemoration in post- and mid-conflict situations (as various as Timor-Leste, Zimbabwe, and Peru), the volume also explores other kinds of expressions of the subject matter such as the challenging re-adaptation processes of a traditional society in post-Soviet Mongolia; the repatriation of a Mexican migrant worker or the intra-national journey of the body of a Mexican drug-lord. This is a noteworthy achievement as the aim of the volume, as outlined in the introduction, is to explore the complex relations between sovereignty and dead bodies in all its manifestations and not only in its most obvious location – the (re)constitution of sovereignty in the aftermath of mass conflict. In this it stands apart from conventional scholarship that confines itself to discussing either situations of conflict or non-conflictual contexts, blocking the reader from attaining a proper insight with regard to continuities and discontinuities between the two.

While the inscription of sovereignty on the living body has been enjoying great scholarly attention now for almost three decades, the dead body has so far remained effectively unexamined. In this regard the volume has been long called for. Of interest to anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, political scientists and researchers of culture, this volume shows in great detail the ways in which dead bodies are part of a complex network of power relations as well as relations of signification, mobilised in various ways in order to parade sovereignty as well as contesting it and finally exposing it to negotiation and renegotiation. It aims at opening up a new sub-field of study. Hence, it mostly focuses on the initial mapping of the terrain, the pointing out of various features of the landscape, and the putting forward of the noteworthy explanatory capacities of Stepputat's outlined theoretical framework.

Yehonatan Alsheh  
Wilfrid Laurier University

## Book Reviews

Nathan Réra, *Rwanda, entre crise morale et malaise esthétique: Les médias, la photographie et le cinéma à l'épreuve du génocide des Tutsi (1994-2014)* (*Moral Crisis and Aesthetic Unease in Rwanda: Media, Photography, Cinema and the Tutsi Genocide (1994–2014)*) (Dijon, Les Presses du Réel, 2014, 585 pp., €30.00 paperback).

Among the books published in 2014, a year that marks the twentieth anniversary of the genocide committed against the Tutsis, this work by Nathan Réra immediately stands out through its purpose and ambition. This substantial French-language monograph – the third book by this young art historian – is effectively the first major study on how the Rwandan genocide has been shown through photography and televised images and the effects of this very recent genocide on the images themselves.

The first part of this study focuses on media coverage of the event and the history of the images that were born out of the Rwandan genocide. It is based on a systematic examination of various audio-visual archival collections, including those of France's *Institut national de l'audiovisuel* and the main news agencies that covered the event, as well as the thoughtful consultation of Belgian, British, French and American newspapers and magazines published between April and July 1994. The attention paid to the founding stage of the information age is primarily intended to allow the author to demolish two commonly accepted clichés: that of an 'image-free genocide' and the 'live committing of genocide'. By tracing the production and consumption process of photographic and television images and by reconstructing the technical constraints (this was a time when professional images and film-based photography prevailed, when the digital era had not begun, when social networks did not exist and when the amateur image had not undergone a transformation) and social expectations of the period, Réra perfectly highlights the inability of the media to report on the presence of the victims' bodies in large numbers and therefore on the genocide's materiality itself. Réra uses this examination to demonstrate the logic – in the name of decency – that presided over a denial of the specific nature of the violence in Rwanda, if not an explicitly revisionist strategy.

The second part focuses on the moral and aesthetic crisis of representation that media coverage of the genocide against the Tutsis caused. Drawing on an impressive series of biographical interviews with dozens of professional photographers and cameramen who were present in Rwanda during the genocide, this socio-historical part of the work demonstrates that this crisis of representation contributed to the migration of the genocide's images from the press and the media to museums, and from television to documentary film and fiction – spaces that were in a better position to accommodate the mutilated bodies, masses of corpses and material traces of the massacres. In so doing, Réra makes a valuable contribution to the history of the era of the witness. He documents from within and from the point of view of photographers themselves, analysing a key historical moment: when the aesthetic and formal moral bankruptcy of witnessing was revealed and called into question.

The study's third and final part is devoted to reflections arising specifically from

the field of visual art history, and more broadly questions the role played by certain artists in the way that a memory of the genocide has gradually been constructed. As his starting point, Réra takes a corpus of works by photographers such as Alexis Cordess, Dominique Robin and Jean-Luc Cramatte, and of filmmakers such as Philippe Van Leeuw, Marie-Violaine Brincard and Sarah Vanagt. Their works produced between 1994 and 2014 all feature a central question concerning the appropriate visual form for evoking the genocide. Returning to the impasses and aporias of the act of witnessing, Réra in effect questions the performative power of documentary and fictional images, particularly when it comes to showing criminals or giving a voice to perpetrators. By way of a comparative analysis of the devices and forms that film and photography turned to in order to speak of genocide in the twentieth century, he highlights both the strictly technical scope and the ethical choices of an 'aesthetic of proximity' that was gradually erected in the Rwandan context for a life-saving access to meaning.

This book ultimately not only provides an important contribution to our knowledge of the genocide committed against the Tutsis, but also represents a milestone in the history of visual studies, demonstrating the links between the history of genocide and that of images. It is our hope that a speedy translation of this volume into English may allow a wider reading of this fundamental work beyond the French-speaking academic world.

Élisabeth Anstett

CNRS – Institut de Recherche

Interdisciplinaire sur les jeux Sociaux

Gabriel Gatti, *Surviving Forced Disappearance in Argentina and Uruguay: Identity and Meaning* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 216 pp., £60 hardback).

What are the implications of forced disappearance in the present day? What do the ways in which people construct narratives about the disappeared say about them? *Surviving Forced Disappearance in Argentina and Uruguay* enables us to think about the effects of disappearance alongside the question of how to survive, and of what it is that actually does survive such a catastrophe. Since the first (Spanish language) version of this book, published in 2008, Gatti's critiques have become an indispensable point of reference in the field of forced disappearance. Its publication in English will make it possible to place this debate alongside other studies of memory, identity and representation within the Anglo-Saxon sphere.

Gatti's starting position is doubly germane – he is a sociologist, and the son and brother of the disappeared – and he explores the limits of the discipline, and of his own position as he addresses the process of forced disappearance that took place in Argentina and Uruguay in the 1970s. Although confined to the Latin American scenario, interpretative tools are provided which can be applied to other present-day situations where the figure of the disappeared has also been emerging. The book carries out a thorough analysis of the forms in which the phenomenon is

## Book Reviews

encountered in order to make disappearance imaginable (to give it an image, to attach an image to it).

Gatti begins the book by analysing the catastrophe that disappearance represents for the modern, civilising plans that built the foundations of the Latin American Nation-States (Chapter 1). Disappearance disrupted at least three of the constituent variables of the modern Western subject: name, time and space. Names are dislocated, because disappearance breaks the logical link between body and identity. The chronological time that structures everyday life breaks down. The subject is violently ejected from 'his space' within the community sanctioned by the State of which he was a member. The figure of the disappeared, a de-civilising paradox, dismantles that modern citizen. Language is also modified by the need to introduce new terms with which to talk about this unprecedented figure: we begin to talk of 'the living dead', of 'the partial absentees', of the 'un-absent'.

However, despite the impossibilities of the task, when catastrophe comes, discourse is produced; in particular, Gatti highlights the emergence of two narratives. One opts to give meaning to the catastrophe, and is associated with the characteristics of a strong identity; the other, which is less widespread, tries to inhabit the very absence of meaning that disappearance produces. The book thus explores how narrative and identity overlap, and in particular the relationships between identities – strong and/or weak – and narratives of meaning and non-meaning.

Narratives of meaning are those which talk about loss, but do so as a step towards a possible and desired reconstruction (Chapter 2). Within this process, the author analyses in detail the work of forensic anthropologists to restore identity to the bodies of the disappeared, and of the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* [Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo] in their search for their grandchildren, kidnapped by the military (Chapters 3 and 4). Filiation and blood, and DNA in particular, become a rhetorical tool with which to undertake the battle for recovery, since blood would seem to conserve what is immutable in the subject: that which can be said to have withstood passage through the world of the clandestine detention centres. Blood is confirmed as an effective nucleus of signification that allows families and professionals to look for continuities between what existed before, and what remains now. The author also shows how, out of catastrophe, new political subjects emerge, redefining themselves through their experience of belonging to communities of victims (for example, the Grandmothers and Mothers of Plaza de Mayo). These subjects, grieving and in pain, but with strong identities, dispute the definition and signification of the figure of the disappeared and are even able to determine public policies.

There are also narratives of the absence of meaning that seem to allow the absence, the remains, the hole, all that is impossible to assimilate, to be inhabited (Chapters 5 and 6). The actors who best express and inhabit those discourses are the 'children of the disappeared', and they do it, in fact, through parody. But what kind of space does such a use of parody (re-)create? Attitudes like this, in which a community laughs in the face of catastrophe, do create something 'in spite of everything': they create new social spaces, they create new terminology ('little post-orphans'), they create new ways of addressing that 'little issue' (black humour, mocking laughter), they create new ways to visualise the un-absent (the

autobiographical cinema of the ‘children of’ is one example of this). The narratives of non-meaning are also creative, although in a different way. While they do not fill the vacuum with one single meaning, these narratives can be read as strategies for making that vacuum an habitable place, something to be lived with, something to be survived.

The proof that all these narratives have become very effective at giving meaning, and in driving policy, can be clearly seen in the fact that they are now being re-used to talk about a diverse range of socio-political events and contexts (Chapter 8), some of which pre-date what happened in the Southern Cone – this is the case with the victims of the Spanish Civil War – and in other ways refer to contemporary situations, such as the disappeared in Mexico.

Sociological reflection on forced disappearance forces us to ask ourselves about the ways in which this inconclusive death, these living/dead people and the structure that placed them into this ‘limbo’, reconfigure the different ways of being, in public and in private, by introducing the certainty of something that is impossible: a life that never ends, a death that is never complete.

Pamela Colombo

École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Institut de Recherche  
Interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux Sociaux

Myra Giesen (ed.), *Curating Human Remains: Caring for the Dead in the United Kingdom* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2013, 197 pp., €65,00, £60.00 hardback).

*Curating Human Remains: Caring for the Dead in the United Kingdom* is the eleventh volume in the series *Heritage Matters* developed by Boydell Press and the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University. This edited volume is intended to highlight the need for open discussion about the current and future state of research involving human skeletal remains in the United Kingdom. The editor and chapter contributors provide a convincing argument for the reason bioarchaeological research involving the study of skeletonised bodies continues to be a valuable means of advancing both our scientific understanding of human history and, more importantly, the cultural heritage of people living today.

Giesen, the volume’s editor, begins by introducing the reader to the legislation, policies and best practices established in the United Kingdom to provide guiding principles for how research looking at human skeletal remains should be conducted. The introduction also provides a concise overview of what each of the following fourteen chapters will cover. The volume’s editor provides a clear vision of what each chapter is designed to achieve in the introduction itself, and I will therefore proceed to highlight some of the points made in the volume that I found particularly poignant. That being said, I would encourage readers to consider each of chapters in the volume individually as all of the authors provide a unique perspective on the ways in which we can and do engage with human remains.

Research that focuses on individuals, both living and dead, is intimately tied

## Book Reviews

to a range of ethical and moral concerns. The volume's authors focus on one or more of the following concerns associated with working with skeletal collections: excavation, analysis, curation, cataloging, access, display, reburial and repatriation. Looking at the issues of excavation, curation and subsequent cataloging of human remains, McKinley (Chapter 12) discusses the importance of considering the logistics of how skeletal remains are managed after they are excavated. McKinley here highlights the growing curation problem resulting from the ever-expanding industry of contract archaeology. Other authors address the issue of having more collections than the museum can handle; Mays (Chapter 10) assesses the possibility of using church-related properties as repositories. The future is not entirely unpromising, however, as Redfern and Bekvalac (Chapter 8) offer hope by highlighting the successful curation and documentation of the extensive collection (approximately 17,000 sets of human remains) at the Museum of London. This chapter is especially interesting because the collections, unlike those of many museums, were excavated using more modern archaeological methods, and the skeletal remains are for the most part associated with the London area and thus match the museum's mission. Clegg (Chapter 14) appeals for the creation of a central database where collections can be inventoried, benefiting bioarchaeology in a number of ways; one potential outcome the ability to transfer collections between repositories based on open space and the repository's overall mission.

Many of the authors discuss issues related to access and the display of human remains. The raised concerns include the development of open access databases so more people are aware of the numerous collections available for study (Chapters 5, 6 and 14), the establishment of policies restricting who can and should have access to the remains (Chapters 3, 8, 11 and 14) and implementation of surveys to gain a better idea of people's opinions about displaying human remains in public (Chapters 7 and 8). Roberts (Chapter 11) provides an excellent cautionary overview of the importance of considering access and display issues. Most repositories can attest to the fact that skeletal remains can be negatively impacted by both established researchers and those who are still in training. Yet, the value of this chapter lies in its highlighting some of the ways human remains become damaged, before balancing this discussion with the realisation that the study of historical people is crucial to understanding what it means to be human. The book adequately highlights the fact that achieving a balance between providing more and limiting access is an obvious challenge that we, as bioarchaeologists, must face.

Finally, several authors address the role of either reburial or repatriation of skeletal remains. For example, Giesen and White (Chapter 1) provide a clear overview of the repatriation of human remains and how this differs throughout the world depending on whether or not there is a legacy of colonial influence and exploitation. In contrast, Pearson and colleagues (Chapter 13) look at the issue of reburial by assessing the shifting governmental policies associated with collections being deaccessioned. This topic is critical as it is imperative that scientific endeavours not be devoid of humanity. We as scientists must continuously examine how our research might affect people who perceive a direct or indirect relationship with

the human remains being analysed, while simultaneously recognising that reburial and repatriation of collections is not always the most appropriate action.

I would recommend this book to anyone considering a career that requires working with human skeletal remains. Being a biological anthropologist that has had the opportunity to work with skeletonised remains in a variety of settings, including in the field, museums and classroom environments, I found that many of the concerns communicated by the authors are issues relevant for researchers both in the United Kingdom and the global community. This book urges us to consider our role in the future of research involving skeletonised remains and provides, as Clegg (Chapter 14) argues in the concluding chapter, an impetus for us to continually reassert the value of analysing human remains as a way of better understanding our shared cultural heritage.

Ryan Harrod  
University of Alaska

Lara J. Nettelfield & Sarah E. Wagner, *Srebrenica in the Aftermath of Genocide* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 418 pp., £75 hardback).

Srebrenica and its victims remains one of the most powerful images of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, a *lieu de memoire* that epitomises the evil in war and the tragic suffering of civilians swept up in nation-state building projects. The photos of mass graves being exhumed and the annual reburial of victims during the 11 July commemoration testify to the enduring strength of the physical evidence of this tragedy at the end of the twentieth century. Just as Auschwitz came to symbolise the pinnacle of the Nazi regime's extermination of European Jews, the town of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina embodied the genocide against Bosnia's Muslim (Bosniak) population during the war from 1992 to 1995. However, unlike the recognition of the genocidal policies of the entire Nazi system, the institutions of international justice (namely, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia [ICTY] and the International Court of Justice [ICJ]) have determined that genocide took place only in Srebrenica and not throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. Moreover, the ICJ's 2007 ruling determined that Serbia was not guilty of genocide, despite seemingly overwhelming evidence pointing to the country's complicity in the crime and aftermath. The paradoxes of international recognition and local denial of genocide, refugee returns and new lives abroad, and commemoration and amnesia, are just some of the themes raised in Lara J. Nettelfield and Sarah E. Wagner's ambitious book on Srebrenica.

*Srebrenica in the Aftermath of Genocide* is not an easy book to categorise because it effectively transcends a strict disciplinary approach and combines research on memory studies, transitional justice, anthropology, and post-conflict democratisation in order to analyse the ability of a community to rebuild in the wake of a trauma of the magnitude which befell Srebrenica. In this transdisciplinary study, the two authors (a political scientist and an anthropologist) develop their argument around the concept of intervention, which is deconstructed into its various

## Book Reviews

meanings – physical, chronological, political – and applied throughout the book. The volume is divided into three broad sections which reflect these interpretations of intervention: ‘Memory and Movement’ (focusing on commemorative events and refugee returns), ‘Redress beyond Bosnia’ (exploring both victims and perpetrators in Diaspora communities), and ‘The Production and Subversion of Knowledge’ (tracing the legal narrative of the Srebrenica genocide and its denial). It is clear that the authors have done extensive fieldwork both in Bosnia-Herzegovina and among Diaspora communities (primarily in the United States), and the large amount of statistical data and analysis is broken up with ethnographic vignettes consisting of personal interviews and descriptions based on field notes taken at commemorations and protest activities.

Perhaps the most interesting section of the book for readers of this journal is the first section, which deals extensively with the memorial complex at Potočari and the commemoration that takes place there annually. In a region with numerous contested and politicised commemorative events stretching back to the Second World War (and even earlier), the Srebrenica commemoration is unique because of the public reburial of identified victims each year. This physical ‘intervention’ into the daily routine of the town is significant for not only the survivors, but for regional political and social actors as a whole, who gather to observe the earthly remains being reinterred in a ceremony that is not simply a series of commemorative speeches. The authors note that the ‘[m]emory of the past propels this motion in a corporeal sense, as bodies of the living and the dead return to the place where the violence began and insist on (re)occupying its ground’ (p. 32). The notion of movement and participatory social action is a constant theme in the book, from the protests staged in Sarajevo after the ICJ verdict to the community events organised by Bosniaks resettled in places such as St. Louis, Missouri. According to Nettelfield and Wagner, ‘organizing themselves for interventions have empowered individuals and communities, and thus yielded subtle, positive effects of social repair’ (p. 4).

In addition to its contribution on commemorative practices related to mass atrocities, both at the local and international level, another of this book’s strengths are the chapters on the legal record of prosecuting those responsible for the crimes in Srebrenica. The authors provide a comprehensive overview of the trials and how they fit into the history of international tribunals since Nuremburg. They also highlight the importance of forensic evidence, such as documents, survivor testimonies, and especially the shocking video of executions by the Scorpions paramilitary unit. The detailed descriptions of the murders of Srebrenica’s men and boys is not an easy read, but it does provide the reader a window into the horrors that continue to affect the survivors of Srebrenica, whether they are trying to rebuild their lives as returnees or as emigrants thousands of kilometres away.

This book does not profess to be the definitive book on Srebrenica, and as such requires a fair amount of background knowledge of the events in Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to make sense of the vast number of individuals who weave in and out of the fragmented narratives. Nevertheless, for scholars of the former Yugoslavia or transitional justice, *Srebrenica in the Aftermath of Genocide* stands out as a bold new way of looking at an event that has been the subject of numerous

studies. Nettelfield and Wagner have completed an emotionally powerful volume which has set the bar high for future scholars working on Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslavia more broadly.

Vjeran Pavlaković  
University of Rijeka