



## *Global Corpse Politics*

Taboos have long been considered key examples of norms in global politics, with important strategic effects. Auchter focuses on how obscenity functions as a regulatory norm by focusing on dead body images. Obscenity matters precisely because it is applied inconsistently across multiple cases. Examining empirical cases including ISIS beheadings, the death of Muammar Qaddafi, Syrian torture victims, and the fake death images of Osama bin Laden, this book offers a rich theoretical explanation of the process by which the taboo surrounding dead body images is transgressed and upheld, through mechanisms including trigger warnings and media framings. This corpse politics sheds light on political communities and the structures in place that preserve them, including the taboos that regulate purported obscene images. Auchter questions the notion that the key debate at play in visual politics related to the dead body image is whether to display or not to display, and instead narrates various degrees of visibility, invisibility, and hyper-visibility.

Jessica Auchter's research focuses on visual politics and culture. She is author of *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations* (2014), and dozens of academic articles and edited volume chapters. She is the winner of the Fred Hartmann paper award from the International Studies Association.

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***Global Corpse Politics***  
 The Obscenity Taboo
- 156 *Robert Falkner*  
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- 155 *David Traven*  
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 Ethics, Emotions, and the Evolution of the Laws of War
- 154 *Allison Carnegie and Austin Carson*  
**Secrets in Global Governance**  
 Disclosure Dilemmas and the Challenge of International Cooperation
- 153 *Lora Anne Viola*  
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# Global Corpse Politics

## The Obscenity Taboo

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page vi</i>
1 Visualizing Corpse Politics	1
2 HORRIFICALLY GRAPHIC: The Obscene Corpse	28
3 The Visual Politics of ISIS Beheadings	62
4 Dead Terrorists and Dead Dictators	90
5 Proof of Death: Evidence and Atrocity	120
6 Displaying the Dead Body: Some Conclusions	149
<i>References</i>	165
<i>Index</i>	187

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Early on in my academic career, Rick Ashley pushed me to be a better scholar and thinker. He was never afraid to ask the difficult questions;

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vii

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Chapter 3 draws on “Imag(in)ing The Severed Head: ISIS Beheadings and the Absent Spectacle,” *Critical Studies on Security*, 6, 1, 2018, 66–84. I thank Taylor & Francis for permission to reprint. Some of my initial thoughts on humanization and dehumanization of the dead, which this book draws upon, were originally published as “On Viewing: The Politics of Looking at the Corpse,” *Global Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Current Affairs*, 7, 2–3, July 2017, 223–238 (16). Republished with permission of Bristol University Press, UK. Some thoughts that appear in Chapter 4 also appear in “Visible Dead Bodies and the Technologies of Erasure in the War-on-Terror,” in Lisa Victoria Purse and Christina Hellmich, eds, *Disappearing War: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cinema and Erasure in the Post-9/11 World*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2017.

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Ultimately, I acknowledge that the dead bodies I discuss in this book are individuals with loved ones. They lived complex lives and, in many cases, experienced complex deaths. My own ethical commitment to better understanding the complexities of political violence has driven this analysis, but I have sought to do so in such a way as to acknowledge that the dead bodies depicted in these images are not simply brute data.

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