

Frames of Memory after 9/11: Culture, Criticism, Politics, and Law, Lucy Bond (2015), Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 218 pp., ISBN: 9781137440099, h/bk, £63.00

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Following September 11 2001, many academics have written of the ‘unprecedented trauma’ and ‘unspeakability’ of the attacks (Greenberg 2003). Lucy Bond importantly warns of ‘the dangers of homogenising cultures of remembrance’ (2) and that, in particular, the *frames of memory* through which 9/11 has become commemorated seek to coalesce around ‘discourses of patriotism and freedom’ (8) through a number of modes. Bond charts the progression of these modes through what she describes as an initial state of mourning, to the politicization of the attacks, and into a more recent stage, whereby there remained a tendency ‘to reflect the personalised introspection of the earlier critical responses’ (9). It is here that Bond’s monograph makes its first intervention, suggesting that 9/11 still remains a relevant and ‘interruptive force in American culture’ (10). In conjunction with her innovative formulations of *transcendental memory* and *montaged* commemorative discourse, Bond suggests that the ‘normative preconceptions and conventions that shade, and to some extent, determine the shape of memory’ (11) can be interrogated and uses a diverse range of commemorative artefacts in order to do so.

Bond firstly explores the entrenched effects of 9/11 on contemporary American culture. As she posits, the event created ‘a historical divide so trenchant that there could be no negotiation, no dialogue, between “before” and “after”’ (16). Without the critical space needed to interrogate these two temporalities, 9/11 has been allowed in both cultural and academic fields to remain woefully under-critiqued. In Chapter 1, Bond interrogates the paradigm of trauma culture that manifests itself as a homogenous lens through which the

‘diverse elements of 9/11’s memorial culture’ are interpreted (51). Using literary forms of representation, such as Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and Shirley Abbot’s *The Future of Love*, Bond argues that ‘much of the popular fiction relating to 9/11 exhibits a dehistoricising bent that eschews concentration on the geo-political context and consequences of the attacks’ (17). Here she follows other critiques of 9/11 fiction, such as those by Gray (2009) and Rothberg (2009) before broadening her scope out to include the personalizing effects of sites such as the WTC Tribute Centre at Ground Zero.

Categorizing the attacks as ‘a moment of national unhoming’, Bond posits that in order to rehome the United States, a reconnection takes place with ‘the founding mythologies of the nation’ (52). Identifying a process through which ‘exceptionalism and triumphalism have been absorbed into the official, vernacular, and commercial memorial culture’ (52), Bond outlines what she terms as a subscription to a ‘new American Jeremiad after 9/11’ in Chapter 2. Bond suggests that these modes mobilize the dead as ‘an absent (and impossible) community’ and that, quoting LaCapra, ‘everyone “is a victim, that all history is trauma, or that we all share a pathological public sphere or a wound culture”’ (85). As such, Bond underlines the yoking effect of the jeremiad and how the various discourses of memory have cemented its position as ‘an organising narrative of American memorial culture’ (85). Using the political speeches of both Presidents Bush and Obama, Bond highlights how the effects of this jeremiad are mobilized, and uncovers its hollowed centre. She argues that this paradoxically unsettles the myths of national exceptionalism that work to elide forms of reflexivity into the attacks. Charting the troubled history of Ground Zero, Bond effectively demonstrates how these dynamics work in (un)practical ways, and forwards ‘a hidden ambiguity about the meaning of the attacks that other auspices of American memorial culture have attempted to hide’ through the use of the jeremiad.

Bond takes the frames of memory that surround 9/11 to develop recent trends in memory towards a comparative framework. Chapter 3 discusses the use of ‘analogical frames of reference for 9/11’, and suggests that the ‘Americanization’ of the Holocaust and its utilization works to dismiss ‘certain memorial constellations’ and that they have been ‘erased in favour of less problematic acts of historical analogy’ (87). By tying memories of Pearl Harbour and the Holocaust, for example, to 9/11, Bond suggests they become ‘metonyms of atrocity: understood as universal symbols for disaster rather than complex historical occurrences’ (92). This works, she argues, in the same ahistorical manner of the widely uncritical traumatization of 9/11 discourse. Moreover, by challenging the moniker of Ground Zero as an appropriation of American bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Bond questions whether this ‘nominative reclamation is intended to facilitate the screening of America’s role as aggressor’ or whether it forces ‘a confrontation with troubling moments from the nation’s past’ (127). Through her discussion of the ethics of these frames of memory, Bond urgently opens up the current discussion around transcultural memory, and usefully highlights the productive and problematic concerns of ‘memory’s fluidity’ and ‘discursive leakage’ (127). She suggests that a more attuned critical engagement ensures comparative and associate frames of memory rather than competitive and homogenous ones.

In her final chapter, Bond threads these dynamics together to discuss the effects of 9/11 on the American juridico-political sphere. She argues that the justice system has failed to ‘impose a stable frame of memory’, instead becoming distorted by the ‘master narratives’ of the attacks, thus affecting the ‘pursuit of both restitution [...] and retribution’ (129). Bond uses case studies such as compensatory lawsuits for victims’ families, military tribunals utilized in incarcerating detainees in camps like Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, and the legal distortions utilized in advocating state sanction of torture, drawing them together with previously outlined cultural processes. She posits that using dissent in memory ‘allows for

divergent approaches to the past' (157) and reflects the montaged nature of the legal system. Further, in an increasingly globalized time, justice surrounding 9/11 should take on 'an international dimension' (157). Finally, she suggests that uncertainty in times of crisis, and presumptions of the legal system's direct associations with memory and forgetting, should be considered with self-reflection so as not to distort the rule of law, and that judiciary judgements form just one part 'of collective memory among many' (159). Using this as a springboard to her ultimate assertion, Bond proclaims the need for a 'montaged approach to memory, law, and justice [...] conceiving each as a multifaceted and open-ended process' (159).

It is through this '*montaged* culture of memory' that Bond seeks to develop a more effective form of transcendental memory, that works across borders and difference. Bond suggests that 'we need to position 9/11 and its aftermath as *global* events with far-reaching causes and consequences' (161), thus challenging the pre-existing forms of hegemonic discourses of the attacks. I would, however, perhaps question the tension that resides in centralizing this American historical moment at the centre of a montaged memory culture. Bond does rightly suggest, however, that this deframing of memory marks a significant intervention for cultural practitioners and academics alike, who are turning towards an extra-national locale. Bond astutely evidences this turn in the critical response to recent political speeches by President Obama, and the attitude evidenced towards some facets of the National September 11 Museum. She suggests that this important demonstration of 'an enhanced memorative literacy, exemplified by the foregrounding of commemorative politics in cultural narratives' indicates a 'more careful attention to the ethics and politics of memory in the global public sphere' (171). As such, through the discursive, and self-reflexive, analysis of 9/11 and its after-effects a negation might take place against the limits of current understandings of 9/11.

References

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