Book Review/Compte rendu

Woolford, Andrew, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton, eds. *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. 344 + x pp., $26.95 paper (9780822357636)

The collection *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America* emerged from a conference where the participants found strong lines of agreement – and where many fundamental disagreements were clearly put forward and discussed. The authors offer definitions of genocide that converge into a few directions that diverge significantly from each other. They also use the term "genocide" for widely varying purposes, some of which include the extension of the term to non-human animals (Hubbard), or the refusal to use the term altogether (Gone) since it stands in the way of renewing relationality and of repairing human communality.

Some common threads can nonetheless be found across all contributions: the theorization of genocide, the scope of realities to be studied in relation to it, and the question of the methodology to adopt in such studies.

If we turn toward the question of what makes genocide specifically *colonial*, we can find a common logic to this collection – even as this question does not seem to be addressed directly and the expression only rarely surfaces. The contributors can be situated on three continuums that reflect the tension between the colonial and the genocidal.

First, their reflections tend to rely on two theoretical innovators: Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term genocide, and Patrick Wolfe, who is at the origin of the concept of settler colonialism. The modes of reliance on these two authors range from a simple reference which allows the contributors to situate themselves in relation to the rest of their field, to a creative engagement with their ideas, and further, in many cases, to a presentation of their views as authoritative, sometimes bordering on a simple appeal to authority.

Wolfe's name is oddly absent from the index in spite of being present in seven of the sixteen chapters. His ideas are used to place agency on the side of the Canadian and American governments not only as colonizing, but as putting in place structures of colonialism – but also to remind us of the agency of Indigenous peoples who resisted and

adapted to domination and genocides. With reference to Wolfe's work, Woolford develops the notion of a colonial mesh, providing the image of a net that can expand or shrink and be tighter or looser in different geographical areas or concerning different aspects of life.

Throughout the book, we find allusions or direct references to the fact that Lemkin saw genocide as inherently colonial and tied to economic reason and dispossession of land. The most fruitful use of Lemkin's work is by Powell and Peristerakis, who define genocide as relational, aimed at the shared structures and experiences of people, rather than as targeting ontological entities such as nations or individuals; in this manner. In adopting the meso-level view that has recently become mainstream in sociology, they are able to show how measures that are usually described as colonial in the literature can become genocidal when they are combined. Lemkin's unpublished work also surfaces to justify the extension of the concept of genocide far beyond the Holocaust. This discursive strategy alone unfortunately does not provide an argument for the common categorization of genocides of Indigenous peoples and of the Holocaust, resembling instead an appeal to authority. As this recourse to Lemkin's intentions highlights the need to address this categorization, it is on the question of the commonalities between forms of genocide that the need for further theoretical work is the clearest.

The contributors to this volume mainly differ on the weight they give to each side of the conceptual opposition personified by the figures of Wolfe and Lemkin. Authors who only give limited – if any – attention to Wolfe and Lemkin nonetheless place themselves on a second, similar continuum. The most empirical chapters range from a focus on structures and actions that are primarily genocidal (all the while serving colonial or imperialistic objectives) to a focus on structures and actions that are primarily colonial but have effects that are genocidal: from Madley, on the genocide of the Modoc; Whaley, on the participation of settlers not tied to governments in genocides in the American Southwest; and Logan, on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights; to Patzer, on Indian Residential Schools and reconciliation in Canada; and Samson, on Innu land claims.

Finally, contributors tend either to focus on people and individuals, or on land and appropriation. In other words, genocide and/or colonialism are seen as primarily involving murder, or as a process of displacement and erasure of culture. Differing logics are presented here: a logic of extermination, as defined by Wolfe; a logic of erasure, set against a right to memory (Logan); a habit of elimination that makes it unnoticed

and bars the possibility of resistance (Jacobs); a political logic to genocide, where political institutions are targeted for destruction to impede the collective existence of nations (Ladner); a cultural logic to genocide, seeking to destroy the material bases of this collective life (Samson); and a logic of dispossession rather than extermination. Ethridge complicates the reality of genocide by explaining the consequences of the capitalist and slavist economy and tying them to depopulation through disease and warfare: colonialism and capitalism appear as appropriative systems, leaving little to think in terms of intent.

The most innovative chapter – when compared to work that is generally published from European perspectives – is by far Hubbard's, which introduces an Indigenous epistemology wherein animals and human beings are equal, related, and co-dependent. Taking the idea of genocide as murder, slaughter, and extermination to its logical consequences, she is consequently able to speak of the genocide of the buffalo as parallel and linked, but distinct from, that of Indigenous peoples. This intervention of an Indigenous epistemology (with Hubbard drawing from a few distinct but related traditions) is necessary; we can hope that further studies of colonial genocide will give more room to Indigenous perspectives, epistemologies, and ontologies, as well as to Indigenous stories and oral sources—as most of the chapters do in varying degrees, making it one of the strengths of the book—rather than accounting for their genocide mostly from a Western standpoint.

The clear attempt to situate the contributions within critical genocide studies is one of theaspects that make the book frustrating for readers familiar with Indigenous studies. Each author presents a good deal of information that is readily available and accessible, for instance about the residential school system in Canada. This same information is also often repeated within the book across its chapters. However, while the term genocide is often used in Indigenous studies (Macdonald, 307) the genocide of Indigenous peoples is rarely discussed in genocide studies (as argued in the Introduction by the editors and in the afterword). There consequently appears to be a clear purpose to this information: to destabilize the field of genocide studies and lead it away from its focus on the Holocaust and the few other genocides that struck the public imaginary and consequently supply the types and the norms by which it is possible to understand other possible genocides.

On the whole, the book creates and maintains in its arrangement a tension between colonialism and genocide that is fruitful and promising: the contributors highlight the social realities affected by the two processes in new ways, showing us possibilities for thinking them together, be

it side by side, through the use of metaphors, or in a deeply intertwined, braided manner.

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