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Abstract

A review of:

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Keywords

Human rights, Anthropology, Genocide

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Genocide: Truth, Memory and Representation edited by A. L. Hinton & K. L. O'Neill. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. 352pp.

This volume of essays, edited by Hinton and O'Neill, examines truth, memory, and representation of genocide from anthropological perspectives. The first comparative anthropological study of these themes, the volume includes a number of widely recognized cases (e.g. Rwanda, Holocaust), cases that are debated (e.g. Guatemala), others where the genocide label is relatively rarely applied (e.g. Nigeria, North/South Sudan), and still other cases that are infrequently even discussed (e.g. Bali, Indonesia). Drawing on "experience-near" ethnographic methods, each contribution to this collection "explore[s] how the genocidal past is represented and reimagined, asserted or elided through narratives and counternarratives, remembered or forgotten, avenged or unavenged, and coped with or silenced and ignored in different contexts and historical moments" (11). While the volume intends to make a special contribution to anthropology, a wide range of readers will find it fascinating and insightful, including this political scientist.

The chapters are imaginatively organized into three parts: **truth**/memory/representation; truth/**memory**/representation; and truth/memory/**representation**, emphasizing one theme in each section, but usefully drawing attention to all three themes as a "single block" or inter-related continuum. The very way the volume is organized speaks to one of its central assertions—that genocide and its representation are more accurately studied in grey, rather than in black and white. Furthermore, the editors encourage readers to "read across editorial decisions...in and through each subtitle" (9), and thus give readers an active role in imagining their own truths and representations.

For example, the first part of the volume, focusing on "discourses about truth" (13), includes a chapter by Burnet that asks "whose genocide?" and "whose truth?" to explore how, in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, the government has used commemorations to maintain, politicize, and enhance ethnic divisions between Hutu and Tutsi. Burnet argues that through an enforced unity policy, the government is "erasing dissent" and "monopolizing suffering" in an effort to maintain its legitimacy. Based on her experience as an international monitor in Sudan, Hutchinson reflects upon how human rights monitors work only with the authorization of the state and selectively report violations in order to retain consent. She argues that the mission in Sudan "did more during its first year to excuse and perpetuate military violence against Southern Sudanese civilians than to curtail or remedy it" (55). Although both chapters speak to truths, they might alternatively be placed in the section on "representation" since they inquire into how individuals, groups, governments, and international bodies selectively represent history, especially violence, to their own ends.

The second part considers memory. Dwyer's chapter, arguing that silence surrounding state-sponsored massacres in 1965-6 Bali does not represent a lack of memory, but rather a conscious choice of "remembering and forgetting" by government, the tourism industry, scholars, and individuals, might also be positioned in the section on "representation." Rodman's chapter turns to eastern Guatemala to consider how civil war and genocide are frequently denied despite widespread information about atrocities. Similar to Burnet's chapter on Rwanda, Rodman

examines how this selective memory legitimizes state action and supports Ladino hegemony, and might be positioned alongside it in the section on “truth.”

The final part explores representation. Focusing on transitional justice in East Timor, Drexler argues that despite multiple institutional responses to violence, distrust and conflict endure since the grey zone between betrayer and collaborator has been inadequately addressed. In further exploring how trials are involved in the “production of the very truth they appear to discover” (219), Drexler’s chapter could also be in the section about truths. Ballinger contemplates the analytical and political use of the term “ethnic cleansing” and examines how Italians, who left the Istrian peninsula following World War II, later adopted the term to describe their plight. As much as Ballinger’s chapter speaks to representation, it also speaks to memory and its reshaping.

Overall, this text is useful and important for those studying or otherwise interested in genocide. Two minor suggestions may have made what is already a very strong contribution even stronger. First, while this very rich collection hangs together much better than most edited volumes and the connections are clear, there are a few chapters in which the authors could have usefully been more *explicit* about how their research addresses the central themes. Second, while readers learn that these very interesting and nuanced chapters are based on in-depth and long-term research, more detail on the research designs and the authors’ roles in the specific research environments would be welcome.

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