



Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies

Vol. 5, n°1 | 2001
Varia

Levene (Mark) and Roberts (Penny), (Eds.), *The Massacre in History*

Oxford, Berghahn Books, 1999, 20 pp., 6 half-tones, maps, ISBN 1 57181934 7

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/800>
ISSN: 1663-4837

Publisher

Librairie Droz

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 January 2001
Number of pages: 146-148
ISBN: 2-600-00607-9
ISSN: 1422-0857

Electronic reference

Thomas W. Gallant, « Levene (Mark) and Roberts (Penny), (Eds.), *The Massacre in History* », *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* [Online], Vol. 5, n°1 | 2001, Online since 02 April 2009, connection on 02 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/800>

about». It was, he tells us, a «mysterious crime in a class of society where», he believed, «deeds of violence are not only foreign, but usually wildly impossible» – the upper or upper-middle classes. It was «purely a problem in murder», the evidence was «purely circumstantial», chance figured prominently in sequence of events, and finally, it was a case that attracted national attention. Thus, in his own introductory words, Pearson introduces us to his literary perspective on crime writing, a vocation he took quite seriously not only for its entertainment value – its storytelling possibilities – but also for the range of commentary such tales provoked about daily life and culture in the American past.

And for the historian this is precisely where Pearson's work is so interesting and rich. He always contextualized his crime narratives, providing beautifully drawn descriptions of a specific town or street, details of domestic interiors and family habits, and even brief accounts of pertinent national and international events. Thus the settings themselves take on a richness characteristic of Conan Doyle or Edgar Poe, while the historical context is both precise and time specific. In addition, Pearson's tales are always sensitive to the nuances of social class and position – the witnesses who must be jailed to be secured, the culinary details of a Victorian household – as well as to the legal and judicial issues involved in high profile murder cases. Equally interesting is his own fascination with the influence of the press on public opinion and the ways in which sensational events are refigured from their original tellings in the public press into a range of popular literary works – novels, stories and plays.

Pearson deserves more significant study (I was unable to turn up one recent critical treatment of him). He wrote a great deal and his work, both the occasional essay, the commentaries on books and book collecting, and certainly his crime stories, offer much to the general reader as well as to the literary scholar and historian of crime and culture. I hope that the publication of *Studies in Murder* indicates a renewed interest in Pearson's work.

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Levene (Mark) and Roberts (Penny), (Eds.), *The Massacre in History*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 1999, 320 pp., 6 half-tones, maps, ISBN 1 57181 934 7

Massacres are everywhere. At least that is the impression one could get from recent newspaper headlines like: «Massacre at Columbine High School». «Jaguars massacre Dolphins». «Massacre in Yugoslavia». From a shooting by some disgruntled teenagers to sports, like the devastating defeat meted out to the Miami Dolphins by the Jacksonville Jaguars, to the annihilation of a village in the Balkans, massacres seem to be all around us. A search of the word «massacre» on the Internet produces at a minimum over 250 000 sites. And therein lay the problem. The concept of massacre has become so ubiquitous in common and scholarly discourse that it has lost much of its analytical utility. The publication of a collection of scholarly essays devoted to the massacre in history should, therefore, be most welcome. Unfortunately, the essays in this volume only muddy the already murky waters about «massacres». While laudably broad in geographical scope, encompassing

Europe, Asia, Africa, South and North America, and chronological coverage, ranging from the Middle Ages to the present, the studies often employ very different definitions of what constitutes a «massacre». So in the end, they generate more confusion than clarity. Thus, even though some of the essays are of high quality and make a genuine contribution, the volume as a whole cannot be judged a success.

The book contains thirteen case studies and a lengthy introduction by Mark Levene. Since there is little thematic unity among the essays, other than that they deal with death, the editors have arranged them in chronological order. Some deal with well-known historical episodes, like the French St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre during the sixteenth-century French Wars of Religion, the 1937 Nanking atrocities, and the recent horrors in Croatia. Others attempt to label as massacres events that are already well known, like Will Coster's examination of England and Robin Clifton's of Ireland during the English Civil War and John Edwards' discussion of violence against Jewish Catholics (*conversos*) in fifteenth-century Spain. While others examine relatively unknown episodes of bloodletting like the Russian annihilation of the Circassians, the eradication of the religious Canudos community in Brazil, and the German slaughter of the Herero of West South Africa. One paper deals with medieval images of a biblical story, the slaughter of the Innocents, and yet another examines the near extermination of the wolf in the United States during nineteenth-century.

The very wide range of topics listed above suggests part of the book's problem. How can we encompass so very diverse an array of phenomena within the single concept of «massacre»? Some of the episodes recounted in the book took place on a single day or even a matter of hours, the street riots in Cordoba described by Edwards for example, whereas others, like the annihilation of Circassians, transpired over the course of a century or more. Some witnessed hundreds of thousands of deaths, as in the Nanking massacre discussed by Callum MacDonald, while others accounted for only a handful of fatalities. Some of the slaughters labeled as massacres took place during wartime and involved mostly combatants, like the cases examined by Coster, and Clifton during the English Civil War, while others claimed the lives of common folk during peacetime, like the slaughter of the Canudos of Brazil discussed by Robert Levine. Some resulted from state-sponsored or state-tolerated actions, such as the German war against the Herero analyzed by Tilman Dederig or the Indonesian atrocities of 1965-1966 discussed by John Gittings, while others, like the anti-*conversos* riots recounted by Edwards, occurred in spite of official attempts to stop them. Finally, in one of the studies, that by Peter Coates on the extermination of the wolf, it is not even human beings who were being killed. Utilizing a definition of massacre drawn from these essays would mean that massacres are indeed ubiquitous – indeed, even daily – events. Compounding this confusion further is that some authors use as synonyms for massacre «ethnic cleansing», «genocide», and even «holocaust». Even as elastic a concept as massacre must snap when stretched to encompass the range of events described in these essays.

Levene's introduction, unfortunately, does little to clarify the confusion. While recognizing the definitional dilemma and while providing a very useful discussion of the issues involved in delineating an analytically precise definition, his essay fails to provide one, or at least one that his fellow contributors subscribed to.

The massacre in history and in the present is a topic of urgent importance. We must, therefore, welcome the publication of the case studies in *The Massacre in*

History. Individually, they contribute to a better understanding of specific episodes of awful bloodletting in the past. At the same time, the lack of a coherent definition of what constitutes a massacre and what distinguishes a massacre from other forms of killing continues to impair our ability to understand this crucial phenomenon. The editors begin the book's abstract by stating « the role of massacre in history has not been given much focused attention by either historians or academics in related fields ». They are correct. But until we develop an analytical framework that defines and delineates the different forms of group lethal violence, I suspect this situation will continue. And so, even though this rich collection of case studies adds to our knowledge about specific massacres in the past, collectively they do little to clarify the massacre in history.

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Ulrich Herbert, (Ed.), *National Socialist Extermination Policies. Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2000, 336 p., ISBN 1-57181-750-6
(Traduction de la version allemande parue en 1998 chez Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main)

Prolongeant une série de conférences organisées durant l'hiver 1996/1997 par le Département d'histoire de l'Université Albert-Ludwig de Freiburg, ce recueil d'une dizaine de contributions rédigées par des historiens allemands de la jeune génération, affiche sa volonté de dépasser la controverse, désormais « stérile », des années quatre-vingt entre « intentionnalistes » et « fonctionnalistes ».

Fortement marqués par les débats ayant eu lieu en Allemagne lors de la parution de l'ouvrage de Goldhagen (*Les bourreaux volontaires de Hitler: les Allemands ordinaires et l'Holocauste*, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 1997), un ouvrage presque unanimement condamné par la profession mais ayant suscité un vif intérêt dans la société civile, les auteurs considèrent qu'au delà des simplifications et des conclusions peu convaincantes de l'auteur, la question initiale – celle du rôle des Allemands, des « Allemands ordinaires » par opposition aux « élites nazies », dans la persécution des Juifs d'Europe – demeure légitime et « même urgente ».

Or pour identifier les motivations des bourreaux, et en particulier ceux des territoires conquis par l'Allemagne comme la Pologne, la France, la Serbie, la Biélorussie et les pays baltes, les vieilles interprétations, présentant l'Holocauste comme l'aboutissement de la *Weltanschauung* nazie ou comme le résultat d'un processus de radicalisation cumulative, apparaissent peu opérationnelles.

Ainsi, à la différence de la plupart des travaux antérieurs, les auteurs s'efforcent d'articuler la part des circonstances dans la radicalisation graduelle de la politique anti-juive avec les tensions résultant du décalage entre la permanence idéologique du régime et l'évolution rapide de ses objectifs à court terme. L'attention apportée par les auteurs à des champs géographiques particuliers permet, outre de riches comparaisons, de replacer la politique d'extermination dans le cadre plus général de la politique nazie de conquête et d'occupation de l'Europe.