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A review of A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Genocide and settler society: frontier violence and stolen indigenous children in Australian history*

Abstract

Genocide and Settler Society constitutes a successful exercise in deparochialization. Until now, discussions of genocides in an Australian context have centered on whether this category could be applied, accompanied by debated qualifications, to the experience of Indigenous people. On the contrary, *Genocide and Settler Society* ultimately and convincingly reverses this order. It is not a matter of testing the relevance of genocide studies to Australian history; rather, there is a need to explore the ways in which genocide studies at large can benefit from an appraisal of the Australian experience. In order to perform this intellectual recasting, Dirk Moses has gathered contributions from a number of very authoritative Australian historians and public intellectuals, some of whom have been tremendously influential, at different stages, in the comprehensive reshaping of the historiographical landscape. These include Raymond Evans and Henry Reynolds (whose works on colonial violence and on Indigenous resistances started appearing in the 1970s), Anna Haebich and Robert Manne (who, more recently, have published extensively on the issue of stolen/removed children), and Russell McGregor and Tim Rowse (who have worked on the manufacture and delivery of Aboriginal policies). At the same time, one of the points of the book is to decompartmentalize this discussion and Moses has also gathered the work of international scholars on genocide in other contexts.

Keywords

moses, review, dirk, edited, history, australian, children, indigenous, stolen, violence, frontier, society, settler, genocide

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Genocide and Colonialism, III:

A review of A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*

by Lorenzo Veracini

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Genocide and Settler Society constitutes a successful exercise in deparochialization. Until now, discussions of genocides in an Australian context have centered on whether this category could be applied, accompanied by debated qualifications, to the experience of Indigenous people. On the contrary, *Genocide and Settler Society* ultimately and convincingly reverses this order. It is not a matter of testing the relevance of genocide studies to Australian history; rather, there is a need to explore the ways in which genocide studies at large can benefit from an appraisal of the Australian experience. In order to perform this intellectual recasting, Dirk Moses has gathered contributions from a number of very authoritative Australian historians and public intellectuals, some of whom have been tremendously influential, at different stages, in the comprehensive reshaping of the historiographical landscape. These include Raymond Evans and Henry Reynolds (whose works on colonial violence and on Indigenous resistances started appearing in the 1970s), Anna Haebich and Robert Manne (who, more recently, have published extensively on the issue of stolen/removed children), and Russell McGregor and Tim Rowse (who have worked on the manufacture and delivery of Aboriginal policies). At the same time, one of the points of the book is to decompartmentalize this discussion and Moses has also gathered the work of international scholars on genocide in other contexts.

In his analysis of the "structural determinants" of a specific colonial form (25), Moses identifies two critical moments of radicalization in the implicitly genocidal intentions and structures associated with settler colonialism. These are frontier violence and the demographic manipulation centered on the long lasting practice of stealing Indigenous children. This is why *Genocide and Settler Society* is good news in the context of Australia's 'History Wars', because it shifts the debate away from somewhat exhausted discussions of the actions of some people in some specific locales, and how and whether these can be documented, and because it presents a systematic discussion of the relationship between settler colonialism and genocidal impulses. In this respect, Dirk Moses' essay provides an excellent overview of Australian sensibilities towards atrocities against Aborigines and an inclusive history of Australian and international discussions of genocide and 'extirpation' and 'extermination'. Moses' analysis, of course, is also a current affair. For example, he emphasizes ongoing continuities, including the ways in which a 'triumphalist' tradition of settler political consciousness is still capable of mustering public sensibilities and how, on the other hand, an unbroken but systematically marginal tradition of humanitarian agendas could only strike "shallow roots in Australian culture" (11).

While Moses' analysis is grounded in Australian developments, as a collection *Genocide and Settler Society* proposes an interpretative model that is significant for other settler contexts as well. Jürgen Zimmerer, for example, convincingly presents an outline for an archaeology of genocide (where the colonial precedent is an

essential prerequisite for successive practices) and for an appraisal of a specific 'population economy' based on race and space (a construction inevitably associated with colonial practices). While the establishment of German Southwest Africa's colonial landscape had initially envisaged a continuing reliance on Herero and Nama workforce, the precipitation of hostilities after the uprising of 1904 produced a rapid radicalization and a genocidal outcome. When the governor of the colony protested against unrestrained mass murder, making his protest on behalf of the colonists and on the basis that labourers were needed for the colonial economy, General Lieutenant von Trotha replied that Southwest Africa was a colony "in which the European himself can work in order to support his family" (p. 62). Colonial genocide is shown as one response to a colonial circumstance that failed to fulfill the features of a specific if imaginary colonial typology.

But if an analysis of the Australian experience is helpful in the context of genocide studies, the opposite is also true. Genocidal moments in Australia have also responded to a colonial landscape that at times failed to comply with a settler typology of expectation and/or wishful thinking. The urge to manipulate demographic conditions coincided with a widespread realization that, contrary to expectations of a "doomed race", Aboriginal demographic decline had been reversed (Rowse's chapter documents this evolution). Atrocities on the frontier also resulted from a varied, stubborn and effective resistance and from a capacity for adapting to the changing conditions of an expanding frontier. In his essay, Zimmerer also faces the necessity of developing an analysis of colonial genocide that allows for the absence of state involvement in the determination and execution of policy, a question that is relevant to Australian discussions. His intuition that it would be incongruous to look for state intervention in a context where there were no fully developed institutions of the state, or better, in a context where the colonial state operated in a way similar to other premodern polities, is illuminating. In the context of Australia, the local agents of the state were generally settlers themselves. They can be said to have been directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of colonial genocides and had an interest in the protection of perpetrators. *Genocide and Settler Society* firmly inscribes the genocide directed towards Australia's Indigenous peoples in the historiographical record.

Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History, edited by A. Dirk Moses, was published in New York and Oxford by Berghahn Books, 2004.

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Other essays/responses in Australian Humanities Review relating to this issue:

- Lorenzo Veracini's **Genocide and Colonialism**;
- Kay Schaffer's essay **In Manne's Generation: White Nation Responses to the Stolen Generation Report**;
- Sue Stanton's essay **Time for Truth: Speaking the Unspeakable – Genocide and Apartheid in the 'Lucky' Country**;
- **Re-membering and taking up an ethics of listening: a response to loss and the maternal in 'the stolen children'** by Brigitta Olubas and Lisa Greenwell;
- Henry Reynolds essay ; **The Stolen Children – Their Stories: an afterword**;
- Carmel Bird's **The Stolen Children – Their Stories**;
- John Frow's essay **A Politics of Stolen Time**;
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