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Book Review
Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial and Memory
By
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University of Pennsylvania Press

Rene Lemarchand's edited volume brings together case studies of mass human rights violations from across the globe. The common thread that runs through these cases is not the brutal treatment of human beings by other human beings, although that fact remains disturbing for anyone in this line of work, but rather how these particular cases of such extreme violence and high death tolls could be forgotten in public memory, when similar events are remembered (Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia).

In Lemarchand's introduction, he states that these case studies bring "into view a broad spectrum of contextual differences in space and time, suggesting that very different sets of historical circumstances may generate broadly similar outcomes" (2). Indeed, this book makes a clear contribution to genocide studies, and multiple disciplines more generally, by drawing attention to the similarities of techniques and ideologies used to kill or justify killings of undesired citizens in cases spanning Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia.

Forgotten Genocides includes eight chapters, each focused on a different case study. Authors of each chapter discuss the circumstances under which genocide occurred, the types of violence used by perpetrators, and mechanisms that have been utilized to erase the genocides from public memory. The range of circumstances from which genocidal acts emerged from in these eight cases include: colonial projects (Namibia & Tasmania), post-colonial transitions (Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, & Tibet) and war (Iraq, Persia, Eastern Europe & DRC). While the historical circumstances prior to mass violence varied across the cases, the end result --attempted elimination of a specific population-- did not change with such variation.

In addition to outcomes being quite similar across the cases, there was also significant overlap between the mechanisms utilized to execute genocidal plans. The denial of civil rights eventually escalating to full-blown massacres was evident in almost every case. Additionally, mechanisms such as forced sterilization (Tibet & Eastern Europe), eugenics (Namibia & Eastern Europe), concentration and/or labor camps

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(Namibia, Tibet & Tasmania), deportation to prisons or abductions (Tasmania, Tibet & Iraq), land seizures (Tasmania & Namibia), forced migration leading to disease and starvation (Persia & Tasmania), and the use of sexual violence and rape (Namibia & Tasmania) were presented in various case studies.

The use of specific gendered practices of torture, such as sexual violence and rape, structured the ways in which people have experienced genocide and its aftermath. Chapters on Namibia (chapter 3), and Tasmania (chapter 4) briefly acknowledge the gendered violence present in genocide. The chapter on the extermination of the Kurds in Iraq best illuminated how post-genocide life can have a major impact on gender roles and women's lives. This was particularly evident as their status changed when they became "the sole bread winners in their family" after so many of the men had died (118). These acknowledgments of gendered violence, although not consistent throughout the book, are important because this aspect is often ignored in mainstream studies of both genocide and collective memory.

In addition to showing how genocide can erupt following a multitude of circumstances, *Forgotten Genocides* makes a substantial theoretical claim. This book challenges scholars of human rights, memory studies, and history to recognize and study public processes of forgetting, similar to the way in which we analyze social processes of remembering. Since the 1990s' "memory boom," collective memory has become, rightfully so, a significant tool of analysis. However, few scholars have taken on the task of flipping the question and asking not what has been entrenched in collective memory, but rather what has been forgotten. While Lemarchand's book does not make specific theoretical claims about why these particular genocides have been forgotten, it nonetheless is an important first step in demonstrating the importance of shedding light on what has been publicly kept in the dark for so long.

This is a valuable contribution, for the techniques used to execute genocidal plans in these cases do not differ substantially from those cases of genocide etched in the public collective memory. These massacres bring to mind images of Rwanda, genocidal rape, of Bosnia, the use of concentration camps, and the Holocaust. This begs the question that looms throughout the book, why do the cases in *Forgotten Genocides* suffer from a kind of collective public amnesia? Furthermore, what social and political processes are at play that allow such crimes to be publically forgotten? Two central mechanisms are illuminated in these eight case studies that begin to shed light on this phenomenon: 1) the denial of access to information during or immediately after the violence to gather data and/or 2) the manipulation of the narrative of violence, either by the perpetrators, their allies, or researchers invested in the perpetrators' protection. This can take the form of concealment of evidence or the removal of reports from public record.

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Denial of access to information through the refusal of journalists, human rights workers or United Nations staff during or immediately after the violence took place in DRC, Burundi, Tibet and Iraq. For example, in Burundi, “every effort was made by the Burundi authorities to deny journalists access to the country, and those few who were given an entry visa were duly accompanied by a government official” (39). Denial of access by the perpetrators was effective in covering up many details of the atrocities including accurate death tolls (DRC and Tibet), and triggered debates on the magnitude of the violence instead of whether it constituted genocide.

The deliberate manipulation of the public narrative of violence, either by the perpetrators or their allies occurred in DRC, Burundi, Namibia, Iraq, and Persia. For example, in the case of the persecution of the Assyrians, the Turkish government provided funding to US and British scholars who supported the theory that the Assyrians and other Ottoman Christian minorities were “deserving of massacres” because they were “rebellious” (129). In the case of the Herero, in what is now Namibia, “copies of the report [describing the atrocities] were systematically removed from public libraries in Namibia and South Africa and destroyed” (53). This created significant challenges for scholars attempting to engage in effective dialogue about the violence in these cases.

While there is still much to be learned about the social and political processes that allow publics to “forget” about such atrocities, *Forgetting Genocides* leads us a step closer in understanding these processes and genocidal violence more generally. In the final chapter, Michael Stewart writes, “Every genocide at the moment it takes place appears to outsiders to be ambiguous and inherently implausible. It is only after the event, that genocides appear with certainty and without ambiguity to have taken place” (154).

Nicole Fox is a PhD candidate in the sociology department at Brandeis University. Her dissertation titled, “Moving Beyond Violence: Memory and Nation in Post-Genocide Rwanda,” was funded by the National Science Foundation, The Research Circle on Democracy and Cultural Pluralism, TAG Institute for Jewish Values, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Maurice J. and Fay B. Karpf & Ari Hahn Peace Endowment. Her dissertation focuses on the role of memorials in the transitional process from mass violence to post-genocide in present day Rwanda. Her scholarship on Rwanda has been published in *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*, *Societies without borders*, and *the International Journal of Sociology of the Family*