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## **Book Review: *Conceptualizing Mass Violence: Representations, Recollections, and Reinterpretations***

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*Conceptualizing Mass Violence: Representations, Recollections, and Reinterpretations*  
Sarah Navras Aafreedi and Priya Singh, eds.  
London, Routledge, 2021  
288 Pages; Price: \$160.00 Hardcover

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Genocide and Holocaust Studies is a vast and international field; however, it still needs to shift the European perspective and breadth in terms of geography and diverse scholars. Why? Because Holocaust and genocide studies is crucial in educating the future and simultaneously keeping the lessons of mass atrocities alive to stop racism, prejudice, and patterns that lead to murder. This co-edited book offers something rare for all scholars of mass violence and atrocities. It covers most continents and shifts the perspective from Europe to other and equally crucial atrocities all over the world. The Holocaust is unprecedented as some scholars have noted and this is why expansion of this study to genocide, war, atrocity is time sensitive.

This book hopes to change the landscape of how we think about mass violence but especially in the context of memory, trauma, amnesia, and history. The contributors of the book are diverse with different academic backgrounds which makes the volume a unique addition to genocide studies. The essays explore many aspects of mass violence, revisionism, reconstruction, atrocities, trauma, testimony, memorialization and literature, and most importantly the issues within the fields of Genocide and Holocaust education. The book offers interesting essays on the Holocaust and history in places like Mexico and South Africa that offer a new perspective and understanding of how non-European countries reacted to Jewish immigration and Antisemitism. This can be seen in Daniela Glazer and Yael Siman's chapter where they write poignantly that:

In April 1934, the Ministry of Interior circulated a confidential memorandum that prohibited the entry of Jews to Mexico. It sought to limit not only the immigration of Jews but also of foreigners considered "non-assimilable" to the Mexican population who were seen "undesirable." But there were two important differences in relation to other groups listed in this document: Jewish immigration was characterized as the most undesirable of all, even though the Jews were those with the most need for refuge.<sup>1</sup>

This quote and essay stood out as a place where this work could be bookended with this quote and issues of assimilation as Dennis Klein synthesizes in his chapter, "Violence and

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Glazer and Yael Simon, "Holocaust Survivors in Mexico: Intersecting and Conflicting Narratives of Open Doors, Welcoming Society and Personal Hardships," in *Conceptualizing Mass Violence: Representations, Recollections, and Reinterpretations*, eds. Navras J. Aafreedi and Priya Singh (New York: Routledge, 2021), 29.

Violations: Betrayal Narratives in Atrocity Accounts,"<sup>2</sup> that empirical and fact-finding narratives miss the point of testimony and witnessing.

The book is educational and compartmentalized in sections for post-graduates who are interested in looking at, for example, the South-Asian context and the Bengali genocide of 1971, the Pinochet regime or even the impact of propaganda and marginality in India and Turkey. Furthermore, there are specific and intimate nuances in essays like "Sonderkommando Photo 4 and the Portrayal of the Invisible" by David Patterson who illustrates through photos the "non-representable-non-representable because the images illustrate the truth that in Birkenau reality exceeded imagination."<sup>3</sup> Putting these aspects of witnessing and thinking about a different context such as Bangladesh could highlight the similarities and differences of genocide.

Trauma is a big underlying theme from the chapters on Holocaust to mass atrocities in Bangladesh and South Africa, Reuven Firestone provides an analysis of Vamik Volkan and how community trauma can be eternalized and how violence can erupt many years later. The essays on marginality like the Yazidis in Northern Iraq illuminate that historical trauma can produce present violence and atrocities against a minority group. But what these essays suggest is that this must be carried on through generations but more importantly different governments.

The set of actions of actions aimed at uncovering the truth and producing memory about human rights violations carried out on the initiative of civil society and the state, have enabled a process of dealing with extreme trauma. However, this process, due to its limitations and inadequacies, has reached an impasse, in which it is impossible to advance as a society in order to overcome this trauma.<sup>4</sup>

The area that may need some attention in this important edited volume is in the *Dialogue and Reconciliation* section where we are disappointed to read only one article, albeit a good one by David Rosen. It would be worth adding more innovative and honest pieces like Rosen's but the volume falls a bit short on more scholars providing ways to heal and mend these issues. His work on religion and violence is essential and the reader would benefit by learning more about reconciliation work in the volume. Finally, this book is crucial and has added value to the field of Holocaust and genocide studies that academia will benefit from especially teaching these lessons to diverse audiences.

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<sup>2</sup> Dennis B. Klein, "Violence and Violations: Betrayal Narratives in Atrocity Accounts," in *Conceptualizing Mass Violence: Representations, Recollections, and Reinterpretations*, eds. Navras J. Aafreedi and Priya Singh (New York: Routledge, 2021), 19–28.

<sup>3</sup> David Patterson, "Sonderkommando Photo 4 and the Portrayal of the Invisible," in *Conceptualizing Mass Violence: Representations, Recollections, and Reinterpretations*, eds. Navras J. Aafreedi and Priya Singh (New York: Routledge, 2021), 153.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Nicholls Lopeandia, "Pinochet's Dictatorship and Reflections on Trauma in Chile: How Much Have We Learned in Terms of Human Rights?" in *Conceptualizing Mass Violence: Representations, Recollections, and Reinterpretations*, eds. Navras J. Aafreedi and Priya Singh, (New York: Routledge, 2021), 204.