

Book Reviews

Mohamed Adhikari (ed.) (2014), *Genocide on Settler Frontiers: When Hunter-Gatherers and Commercial Stock Farmers Clash*, Cape Town: UCT Press, ISBN 9781919895680, 356 pp. (also London: Berghahn 2015).

This volume is a carefully crafted project, not one born out of a conference or a panel, after which the presentations were compiled rather opportunistically, if not altogether sloppily. Its conceptualisation was triggered by the insight of its editor that his own findings could not be automatically generalised beyond the case study. Based on his research into the extermination of Cape San (also called Bushmen), Adhikari originally adhered to the hypothesis that stock farmers' invasion of the land originally utilised by hunter-gatherer communities would invariably result in forms of genocide. But the case of Ghanzi in Bechuanaland made him aware of a variety of specific cases that were anything but uniform and, hence, challenged an all-too-convenient conclusion. Motivated by this insight, he decided to initiate a comparison of settler-colonial impacts on foragers that had not yet been undertaken with such a nuanced depth. To obtain the much more differentiated result he desired, he started "to cold canvass academics across the globe working on related issues" (ix). This mission was accomplished successfully and convincingly with the collection of case studies presented in this volume.

They offer a wide range of lessons, mainly from early colonial encounters between settlers and indigenous hunter-gatherer communities. Case studies present local examples from Southern Africa (Cape Colony, North Eastern Cape, Transorangia, South West Africa, and Ghanzi in Bechuanaland), a comparison between the Cape and Australia, and further case studies from Western Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, the American plains frontier, and the Canadian prairies. All authors are highly competent scholars with long-standing track records in their particular fields. The compilation's greatest merit is therefore not in the individual cases explored (often presented by the same authors elsewhere in much more detail) but in the specific blend of cases covered and the volume's guiding question, which sought to describe "how destructive settler colonialism had been of indigenous peoples, especially hunter-gatherers" (ix).

The ten chapters presenting the mentioned case studies are complemented by a concise introduction and a concluding summary, both of which manage to capture the diversity of the investigations into similar

processes with at times rather different forms of local interactions and consequences. Adhikari captures the essence of the findings by suggesting that settler colonialism is not “inherently genocidal towards hunter-gatherer peoples, but that in cases where commercial stock farmers invaded the lands of foraging societies it was generally so” (29). Upon closer examination, the nature of the local pastoral economy and, in particular, its degree of external links were decisive factors for the types of interactions that took place. In the end, therefore, it was mainly specific economic motives and interests that eventually triggered extermination strategies. As most cases were able to document, “the extent of access to capitalist markets and the operation of a profit motive” were “the key drivers of mass violence” (29).

Lorenzo Veracini reinforces this insight in his chapter, further exploring the conflicts between hunter-gatherers and commercial pastoralists (in the main: European settlers) with reference to the case studies presented. Most inspiring is his additional notion that the pastoral settlers in most cases, due to the nature of their expansion and their background as migrants from European societies, were themselves “possessive nomads”. As he emphasises, “pastoral settlers were nomads, even if of particular kind” (302). Their negative view of foragers (as having less human value – if they could be considered humans at all) served as a kind of legitimising ideology for extermination practices, but actually documented the double standards and selective perception of the invaders. After all, “settlers were indeed a tribe of possessive nomads. They were often enforced nomads, too, as it was the enclosures at home that threw them off the land and forced them into exile” (303). Hunter-gatherers at the same time and in a variety of different locations contributed to a similar process of self-identification and constitution of the invaders as a community with a global settler identity. In the process of occupation and invasion, the indigenous foragers “were *turned* into ‘nomads’ and became even more vulnerable to extermination. They were nomadified” (304; emphasis in original).

That such insights are also highly political in current settings is explicitly captured by Veracini’s observation that not only settler-colonial transfers replicate such interactions. It is also applicable to the ongoing Israel/Palestine conflict, as “settler colonialism routinely needs to perceive, represent and indeed produce indigenous non-fixity in order to project its own permanence” (304).

This volume adds value not only to our knowledge of (often, but by no means always) genocidal practices in encounters between early settler colonialism and local hunter-gatherer communities. It also offers striking

new aspects in the analysis of the settler communities and their motives. The comparison from global perspectives thereby allows lessons to be drawn that are not necessarily as obvious as they would have been had the studies been confined to a specific region. Further studies on settler colonialism and local interaction – as well as the studies on forms and practices of genocide – will greatly benefit from the insights presented in this publication.

- Henning Melber