

Title—Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, & Subaltern Resistance in World History

Author—Dirk A. Moses

Year—2010

Categories: Colonialism, Empire, World History

Place: The World

Time: 1500-1960

Argument Synopsis:

This anthology seeks to unpack the various meanings and links associated with the words: empire, colony, and genocide. Moses notes that these key words are particularly laden with controversial connotations, their meanings often shaped by the lens of nineteenth and early twentieth European history. Although the collection is framed as a world history, there are no claims of comprehensiveness, with Moses highlighting that the collection only scratches the surface of world history. A central question throughout the essays is **whether the colonial wars of conquest and counterinsurgency were qualitatively different from genocides** in Europe. Most of the chapters are concerned with the degree ‘genocide’ as a term can be used to understand devastation wrought by colonialism in the past 500 years.

Throughout the essay collection, various authors pose critiques of the definition of genocide, including Mark Levene in his chapter, “Empires, Native Peoples, and Genocide.” Levene notes the dominance of the West for all of contemporary history in providing the hegemonic economic and political framework that all societies must operate within. Levene claims that the dominance of this framework has allowed the persistence of genocide, within a colonial setting, to be overlooked. According to Levene, imperial genocides were an endemic feature from the time of the French Revolution to the outbreak of World War I. Patrick Wolfe proposes the use of the term ‘logic of elimination’ rather than genocide to discuss the effects of settler-colonialism in his chapter “Structure and Event: Settler Colonialism, Time, and the Question of Genocide.” Wolfe underscores that the logic of elimination, or the drive for the dissolution of native societies, is that primary motivation that distinguishes settler-colonialism from all other forms of colonialism.

The latter portion of the book delves into case studies of events, after the terms have been well established. In “Genocide in Tasmania: The History of an Idea,” Ann Curthoys aims to understand why internationally Tasmania is recognized as having experienced a genocide, but never within Australia. She argues that the divergence between international and Australian approaches has been detrimental to both genocide studies and Australian historical scholarship. The collection of essays provides various different understandings of the terms **empire, colony, and genocide**; the focus on whether the destruction of colonialism can be defined as genocide.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Question of whether colonizers trying to impose specific patterns of life upon a subject population is inherently genocidal
- Drawing on traditions of anti-colonial writings helped to develop the concept of genocide
- The meanings of the terms empire, colony, and genocide have been heavily imbued with connotations from early twentieth century European history