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Dean Neu, Richard Therrien. *Accounting for Genocide: Canada's Bureaucratic Assault on Aboriginal People.* Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2003. vi + 194 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55266-103-1.

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Placing a Monetary Value on Human Lives: Bureaucracy as a Tool of Colonial Genocide

Of bureaucracy, Max Weber once wrote that "as an instrument for 'societalizing' relations of power [it] has been and is a power instrument of the first order," particularly for the ones who control the bureaucratic structures.[1] In relation to genocide, Zygmunt Bauman demonstrated the brutal power of bureaucracy by exposing its central role in the perpetration of the Holocaust. As he wrote, "bureaucracy did not hatch the fear of racial contamination.... For that, [the Holocaust] needed visionaries, as bureaucracy picks up where visionaries stop. But bureaucracy made the Holocaust. And it made it in its own image."[2]

In line with Bauman's work, *Accounting for Genocide* attempts to connect bureaucracy–in particular, the practice of accounting–to the colonial relations of power that have long dictated the relationship between Natives and non-Natives in Canadian society. As Dean Neu and Richard Therrien make clear, the purpose of their text is to demonstrate "that accounting techniques and calculations have been, and continue to be, essential tools in translating imperialist/colonial objectives into practice and that genocide is often the result" (p. 5). They argue that accounting has played a mediating role in defining the power relations between Native and non-Native Canadians, employed by the state as a means of indirect governance in its attempts at containing and assimilating Aboriginal peoples. This deployment of accounting, however, has been rooted in manipulation, used to coerce Native Canadians into following the demands of colonial regimes. As a result, "throughout this book, the violence of human action, of one group imposing its will upon another, is intertwined with the violence of bureaucracy" (p. 4).

Neu and Therrien corroborate their argument by examining government documents, polices, and practices from 1857 up to 2001. They examine, for example, how governmental finance policies such as those laid out in the *Indian Act* (1867) and the *Indian Advancement Act* (1884) regulated Aboriginal peoples by carefully controlling how they could access and sell land or spend annuity monies received from the federal government. With supporting tables featuring excerpts of actual government documents, Neu and Therrien clearly demonstrate how numeric value was attached to nearly every aspect of Aboriginal peoples' lives. Whether through property assessments, expenditures through the implementation of residential schools, or through accounts of personal wealth on reserves, the authors clearly establish that Aboriginal humanity was neatly corralled and contained in the realm of quantitative value. Indeed, even Native resistance is subject to this bureaucratic assault–the Oka standoff of 1991 runs through the accounting gamut to rationalize the federal government's use of force (but also, its substantial use of the public coffer to pay for this force).

Though financial policy and accounting practices may be unfamiliar to many of us, Neu and Therrien are successful at making the concepts coherent to a general audience. One need neither a degree in business or accounting to understand the authors' points, as they carefully translate the complexities of accounting into fodder for general consumption. This clarity is not, however, the text's only positive–it is also an eloquently written and carefully documented piece. This, I believe, is a result of the professional composition of the team–Neu is an academic and Therrien is a poet–and contributes to a beautifully articulated and well-corroborated argument. The poet in Therrien results in a lyrical venture into the sterile world of numbers, while the academic diligence of Neu ensures a strongly documented argument.

Importantly, though the issue of whether the term "genocide" is rightfully applied to the colonization of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas is highly contested, Therrien and Neu refuse to back away from calling this violence genocide and, indeed, construct a well-documented case for considering it such.[3] Their argu-

ment, I feel, will no doubt serve as a valuable contribution to discussions of this issue. This, however, leads me to what I consider the book's most important contribution: evidence of the practical application of genocidal theory. The power of this text is that it moves away from theoretical considerations of genocide to examining practical applications of genocidal policy in the social realm or "on the ground." It very carefully delineates, supported by the colonizer's own documents, how genocide was transformed from theory into practice. As a result, this study, very importantly, offers not only tangible evidence of the application of colonial oppression against Aboriginal peoples, but also of the application of genocidal theory. Indeed, Neu and Therrien's work represents a case study in genocide.

Overall, Neu and Therrien have carefully constructed and supported their argument, and the text will leave the reader strongly convinced of the bureaucratic assault that colonial regimes have used and continue to use against Canadian Aboriginal peoples. More importantly, however, *Accounting for Genocide* makes an important contribution to the consideration of the colonization of Aboriginal peoples as genocide. This text is particularly important because it indicts the seemingly mundane and objective realm of numbers for contributing to violence against Aboriginal peoples. For though murder is a formal end, it is an extreme; and it is the mundane and insidious acts of violence that have the most substantial long-term effects on Aboriginal peoples.

Notes

[1]. Ian McIntosh, ed., *Classical Sociological Theory: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 149.

[2]. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity in the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 105.

[3]. See, for example, Guenter Lewy, "Were American Indians the Victims of Genocide?" *Commentary* 118 (2004):55-63; or Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas: 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997).

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