

**Gideon Mailer, *Remembering Histories of Trauma: North American Genocide and the Holocaust in Public Memory* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 222 pp., ISBN: 978-1350240636.**

In recent years, the concept of genocide—coined in the early 1940s by Polish Jewish legal scholar Raphaël Lemkin—has been increasingly politicized, whether by regimes that wield it as a rhetorical weapon or by groups with a claim for the recognition of historical wrongs. In Canada, the term “cultural genocide” entered public consciousness when it was included in the Introduction to the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* in 2015, while in 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls concluded that violence against Indigenous women and girl, both historical and ongoing, amounts to the crime of genocide.

Gideon Mailer’s ambitious study of the intersections of memory politics surrounding two instances of genocidal violence (i.e., settler colonial genocides of Indigenous peoples in North America and the Holocaust, the Nazi genocide of European Jews), sheds new light on the debates around this weighty concept. Mailer rejects the model of competing claims in favor of a careful examination of both contingent and structural convergences between memories of these disparate traumatic histories. He weaves a pattern of synergies between representations of the calculated elimination of Indigenous peoples in North America and the attempted systematic annihilation of European Jews. He argues that, in memorial culture at large, both genocides have been sublated into universalising abstractions that have served to bolster state making projects on both sides of the Atlantic by uphold the “civilising myth,” purported human rights agendas, and liberal values of equality, diversity, and tolerance. For Mailer, subsuming the specificity of groups’ memories of trauma by abstract public representations also come at the cost of reducing dynamic and vibrant Indigenous and Jewish histories to accounts of genocidal loss. For contemporary generations, it carries the danger of assimilation and dissolution of distinct cultural patterns.

The book is divided into three sections: “Theory,” “North America,” and “Europe.” Despite these divisions, Mailer insists on the continuity of the imperial paradigm between the early colonial ambitions of European powers—with their calamitous consequences for Indigenous communities—and the multicultural democracies in the United States and Canada. His account belies, therefore, the North American states’ narratives of new beginnings. The examination of the confluence of Indigenous and Jewish histories and memorial practices must be grounded in the recognition that European imperialism—buttressed by race ideologies that construed entire populations as the threatening other while also rendering them disposable—was the direct

cause of the genocide of Indigenous peoples in North America and the *long durée* underpinning of the Nazi genocide of the Jews.

In the last decade and a half, Holocaust and genocide scholars (such as Dirk A. Moses, Jürgen Zimmerer, Edward Westermann, and others) have drawn attention to the connections between Hitler's conquest of Eastern and Central Europe and the history of colonialism and racial imperialism. In doing so, they have inscribed the Holocaust in the continuum of modern European and American history, against the view of the Holocaust as a unique and incomparable historical event. On the other hand, some scholars and writers in settler colonial studies, including David Stannard and Ward Churchill, have controversially drawn on comparisons with the Holocaust to draw attention to the magnitude of colonial destruction of Indigenous lives and cultures. The structural resonances between the two histories and the potential for alliances between the two groups regarding strategies of representing these histories have been only sporadically documented.

Contesting staid memorial paradigms, Mailer proposes an approach to representing history that anchors the two groups' memories of genocides in the specificity and distinct nature of their historical trajectories and cultural traditions. Mindful of the pre-eminence of Holocaust scholarship in the area of genocide studies, he foregrounds the ways in which Holocaust memorial culture can benefit from the expertise of Indigenous scholars and cultural practitioners. Inspired by Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance, which the Anishinaabe scholar coined to emphasize resilience, creativity, and sovereignty inherent in the notion of Indigenous survival, Mailer avoids the pitfalls of victimological narratives and trauma mining. He advocates instead for an active and circumspect engagement with history that is grounded in transcultural and multidirectional exchange of ideas, thus opening spaces for joint conversations about decolonising memorial institutions and future-oriented forms of cultural preservation. He provides compelling, well-researched examples of memorial co-mingling, both historical and contemporary. These examples include texts by Yiddish writers in postwar America that used Indigenous analogies to bemoan the loss of Jewish culture; instances of research on Holocaust trauma that have informed Indigenous communities' reckoning with the legacies of residential schools in Canada; or the influence of Indigenous interventions into European ethnographic collections on Holocaust scholars' recognition of the importance of material culture in the study of the Jewish genocide.

At the same time, the enormous scope of the book, combined with the author's painstaking documentation of sources, while impressive, makes it difficult to navigate the dense thicket of scholarly references and historical threads. There is a certain dissonance between the salience of Mailer's argument, supported with the cornucopia of examples, and a somewhat flat repetition of the mantra against the dangers of the

universalisation. The book's underlying assumption of the neutrality and veracity of archives as repositories of actual histories in contradistinction to memorial institutions' instrumentalization of history is indefensible in light of, for instance, Ariella Azoulay's exposition of the imperial provenance of the concept of the archive as such (in *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, 2019). Moreover, while Mailer includes some examples of innovative contemporary approaches to Holocaust commemoration in Eastern and Central Europe, the former home of the majority of European Jews, the minimalism of these references as well as some sweeping claims about these practices are disappointing. Considering the globally interconnected nature of Holocaust memory, the absence in the book of even a single reference to Holocaust memory in Israel is rather conspicuous.

Mailer provides notable examples of Canadian First Nations' cultural and political resurgence and deftly analyses the memory politics at federal sites of remembrance in Canada, such as the Canadian Museum of History and the National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa and Winnipeg's Canadian Museum of Human Rights. As such, the usefulness of Mailer's book for Canadian Jewish studies is indisputable, albeit with several caveats. Firstly, Mailer does not clearly distinguish between distinct imperial histories that contributed to the emergence of the American and Canadian state projects, with their different policies vis à vis Indigenous groups and approaches to treaty making and Indigenous sovereignty. The two countries' responses to the "problem" of Jewish refugees before, during, and after WWII were also dissimilar, generally to Canada's disadvantage, with consequences for their respective strategies of Holocaust commemoration. Further, despite Mailer's careful attention to the multiplicity of Jewish histories and traditions, the references to contemporary American and Canadian Jews give an impression of these diverse communities as a somewhat monolithic group.

Overall, Mailer's *Remembering Histories of Trauma* gives us only a small taste of the opportunities that the engagements between Indigenous and Jewish histories and memorial practices might open in Canada. Nonetheless, in recognition of the urgency of Mailer's call for a different mode of representing genocidal pasts, we ought to consider this book an invitation to Canadian scholars and memory practitioners to step out of our respective silos and pursue instead a decolonial, dialogical model of engaging with Indigenous and Jewish histories, with a view toward contemporary co-existence.

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