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Michael J. Shapiro. *War Crimes, Atrocity, and Justice*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015.

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Abstract

Review of Michael J. Shapiro. *War Crimes, Atrocity, and Justice*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015.

Keywords

war crimes, justice

Michael J. Shapiro. *War Crimes, Atrocity, and Justice*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015. ix + 219 pp.

This timely collection of essays on alternative approaches and sources to the problem of violence in modern times is written by Michael J. Shapiro, a professor of politics, and meant for cross-cultural studies, especially those seeking new insights from unfamiliar or new vectors of analysis. Its topics—aggression, the legitimizing of state and corporate action, surveillance and long distance warfare, and the mystification of policy through art—have long been of interest to writers of narrative, to wit, historians, journalists and biographers.

Dr. Shapiro's five chapters, expanding upon three previously published studies, attempt to expand understanding of the unthinkable by combining specific twentieth- and twenty-first-century violence and miscarriages of justice with differing methodologies and frames of reference. His chapter "The Global Justice Dispositif" offers us the "shadow worlds" of exploited marginal people, such as immigrants and refugees, and points to the limits of universalist justice. The image of the war criminal, "the man in the dock with headphones" (26), takes responsibility for the result of his actions in the Balkan civil wars. But Shapiro's text asks where political discourse refrains: What of the global capitalists on the train who plan to profit from the results of the chaos sewn by the defendant? Michel Foucault's "will to know" is indeed absent. Legal indictments and master narratives usually omit impact statements that would be recognized by the actors and also be coherent to later generations. For historians, this is a central element of "the problem of memory," the circumstance of its construction and the selection and omission of actual events remembered.

The "necropolitical" aspect is particularly informative. The insights with which these chapters are seeded, such as the rule of law corresponding to the cell phone reception map of troubled political areas, the correlation of sex trafficking to U.N. peacekeeping areas, the transmuting of religious meditation into corporate indexing of afterlife ritual, report reality, and the safe narratives Shapiro calls "apparatuses of perception more important than generation of purpose" (86).

Since the twentieth century, technology and the fetishizing of perceived surface emotion and expression have been useful in alienating the individual as much as inspiring mass audiences and electorates. Chapter Two, "Atrocity, Secularization and Exuberant Lines of Flight," presents the problem of how the state manages life, notably Nazi eugenics law, and the optics of the Second Iraq War under President George W. Bush. At the policy level, the wars were a series of dynastic calculations and presentations, but in Chapter Three "What Does a Weapon See?" the Marines see opposing forces through the lens of the video game *Grand Theft Auto*. The drone pilots saw transmitted target points, as in Orson Scott Card's science fiction classic *Ender's Game*. Cultural artifacts scripted experience

as certainly as American Civil War soldiers had referenced the Bible and Homer's *Iliad*. Shapiro notes modern warfare's lessened sense of mutual risk, expanded from automatic weapons to a relayed battle presence via satellite and computer targeting, as well as remotely delivered bombs or improvised explosive devices. This is the experience of anonymous killing that was foretold with the experience of the First World War. The loss of empathy has been feared, and enacted, ever since. It is often seen as defining modern man, but is not unique in the narratives of those who plan and those who undertake state violence, as Greek histories bear witness to the mind in war.

"Borderline Justice" is the subject of Chapter Four. Its relative image is encapsulated in the Mexican drug war anecdote of Carlos Fuentes encountering an unmapped village and learning that its name was "Santa Maria" when one side prevailed, and "Zapata" the rest of the time. Villagers experienced their geography by knowledge of which power was ascendant, formulating space and defining ideology and institutions from moment to moment. A countryside in apparent flux, but actually caught in a stasis of perpetual conflict, is summed up perfectly in the statement: "The linear model of history as a progressive justice-achieving dynamic in which lives are improved does not hold" (137). Mexican provinces, as frontiers in private wars, destroyed by drug lords, their armies, vassals, and clients, are theaters of trade, in turn destroying the earlier culture and social order.

Chapter Five, "Justice and the Archives," provides perhaps the best example of Shapiro's juxtaposition of an event and moral principle with an unexpected artifact from art and literature. It addresses the September 11th *attentat* 'terror attack' through New Yorker Linda Hittendorf's documentary "The Cats of Mirikitani" (2006), which details her friendship with a homeless street artist whom she took home after the attack. Learning through "the politics of recognition," Hittendorf discovers that the elderly artist is a Japanese American victim of World War II internment camps, orphaned by the Hiroshima blast, and was forced to sign away his citizenship. Though the documentary project began through association with his art, her empathy was awakened during the mass shock of the terrorist attack. The object of her art became an individual, whose name, citizenship, identity, and connection to society she was able to recover before his death in 2012. 9/11 moved her to a new way of seeing and to the discovery of a life shaped by the aspirations and failings of the modern social order, often defined through aggression, and ritual languages of legitimatizing. Some say that the twenty-first century arrived when that first airplane struck the Twin Towers, but the street artist might dispute whether it is not an exact continuance of the century that went before it.

Dr. Shapiro's book deservedly won the 2015 Easton Prize for Political Theory from the American Political Science Association. This approach to modern politics, especially violence and the devolution of civil society, is an insightful and

stimulating tool for scholars in many fields, including literature, politics and history.

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