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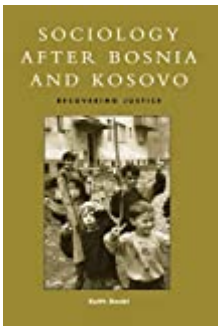

Keith Doubt. *Sociology after Bosnia and Kosovo: Recovering Justice.* Postmodern Social Futures. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. xiii + 183 pp. $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-9376-4; $30.95 (textbook), ISBN 978-0-8476-9377-1.

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Sociology Confronts Ethno-political Conflict

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Keith Doubt has embarked on an ambitious and an all too rare enterprise – bringing to bear some tenets of the sociological elite on apparently intractable interpretations of the real world, here and now.

This turns out to be an unintended comment on the nature of sociology. For the sociological statements are not in the form of testable hypotheses, but interpretations. As in anthropology, there is little by way of technique, in the absence of proposition forms, to judge whether or not one interpretation is more valid than another. They are in their nature humanistic, more akin to history than to science.

Doubt brings his erudition to bear by applying forms of interpretation to different real life phenomena in the Bosnia-Kosovo conflicts, and contrasting them with media interpretations, also showing how they can be used to convey a greater sense of understanding. As well, Doubt uses his argument to criticize sociology – especially for nearly ignoring a consideration of difficult, chaotic, situations such as these conflicts – a criticism which, in my view, is modified by a quite reputable bibliography of his colleagues' writings.

He demonstrates in an interesting way that the often competitive "schools" of sociology each have a great deal to offer if they are treated as supplementing each other rather than as rivals. The thrust opens Doubt himself to criticism. The exercise is also intended to throw light on the nature of the conflicts themselves, to interpret their origins in the society and culture in which they are embedded. Thus he rightly questions the validity of the term "genocide" as a portmanteau description (although he is forced to use it later) and opts for "Sociocide – to kill a society".

But hold on. If you are going in that direction, you need to take into account the *other* social sciences which have something to say about society and attacks upon it. I find it disappointing that the extensive writings of contemporary socio-cultural anthropologists, some of whom have delved deeply into the dynamics of the region, have been totally ignored – save for a wee reference to ethnology at one early point. I am not yet persuaded that "ethnocide" is not an apt term. More importantly, it would

seem that the thrust of the anthropological interpretations suggest that many of the events could be seen as the outpouring of long lasting structural family and power tensions which were but waiting for the downfall of centralized government to erupt, this observation not being in conflict with another, in that interethnic marriages and understandings had been developing strongly.

Each Chapter has its test-theme – Face-Work (Goffman); latent function (Merton); inconvenient facts (Weber); the ritual of shame-metaphysical guilt (Jaspers); the dialectic of the scapegoat (taking off from Freud); feminism and rape as a transgression of species-being (The Cyborg Manifesto); the iron cage of rationality (Weber on bureaucracy); charisma (Weber); journalism and modern ethics (various authors); Chomsky's problem (Weber, Schluchter, Chomsky); the injustice of post-modernism (Lyotard, Handke, Parsons, Simmel); against positivist-utilitarian understanding (Parsons, Hayden); justice and peace before Utilitarianism (Durkheim, Goffman, Parsons). Woosh!

The writing, in both the author's words and those of his sources, is jargon-filled, "Deconstruction" instead of "analysis." The quotation from Goffman at the heading of Chapter 3 is a marvel of stating a simple trite truth in such a way as to obscure the underlying simplicity and cause those who have not succumbed to it as a mantra to scratch their heads in disbelief. (Don't worry; I've written plenty of jargon in my time!) But the reader interested in the reality of Bosnia and Kosovo will be put off.

The brief work should be read not only by sociologists but by other social scientists such as historians, anthropologists, political scientists, so that they may be encouraged to follow Doubt's example – and do better. Where are the propositions in your discipline? What are the interpretive models? Ferret them out, see how far they go in real contemporary situations.

But the main value of the book will be in the classroom. The book is an extremely good text from which to debate some of the essence of sociological theory, and explain it, while focussing on real issues, not only of Bosnia and Kosovo, but, by extension, other fields of conflict in which TV, the press, and popular and immediate writing form public opinion.

The last chapter, Afterword, is a disappointment. Instead of bringing together the results of the enquiry, with a resounding Hurrah!, Doubt retreats into a moralizing plea for honesty in reporting and analysis.

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