

the ways legal vocabularies modify and distort the interpretations and practices of this conceptualisation, through the analysis of the different emphases in demands for justice by various groups after the bombing of the AMIA building, through a portrait of the Brazilian police ‘as individuals in a weak system’ (p. 93) pursuing their safety and benefits rather than enforcing the law, to, in the conclusion, the vagueness of the whole notion of justice in traditional indigenous applications of ‘the law’. This journey is rather too meandering to be able to provide a common denominator on the ‘why’ of these differences. The author of the conclusion therefore provides only a very open-ended reading of the whole, namely that ‘the manifold invocations of and negotiations around “justice” that we find in this book can be understood as a *response* to deficit, rather than the reflection of one, that is to say, an engagement with a paradoxically opaque moral, cultural, and legal category as a way to create space within which at least the possibility of alternative futures can be envisioned’ (p. 206). As an optimistic view this may stand, but the cases of the book in reality are too miscellaneous to sustain it. For example, a commonality on the learning processes people go through in their life-long re-interpretation and pursuit of justice is absent in this nevertheless very interesting compilation.

On the whole, this is a much-needed type of publication on ‘anthropologies of justice’ (or of democracy or human rights for that matter), because our analyses of these notions really require insights into local and alternative perceptions and strategies. This compilation makes a substantial contribution, but could have been designed a bit more cohesively.

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Anita Ferrara, *Assessing the Long-term Impact of Truth Commissions: The Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Historical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 258, £90.00, hb.

This book’s declared aim is to use the case of Chile to pilot much-needed techniques and models for robust qualitative evaluation of what truth commissions do, or can do, over time in societies emerging from political violence and/or an authoritarian past. While it is undoubtedly true that systematic longitudinal case studies of truth commission impact are unforgivably rare, and sorely needed, and although the book itself has other merits, this particular objective is not totally achieved. The author begins by providing a fairly mainstream survey of classic transitional justice literature – quite narrowly focused in both thematic sweep and temporal reach, with much emphasis on work from the 1990s and early 2000s, and by the early ‘transitologists’. This gives way to detailed accounts of Chile’s first Truth Commission, in 1990/1, and then of subsequent developments in the areas of reparations policy, perpetrator prosecutions, more truth revelations, and memorialisation. The book takes us up to 2013, the fortieth anniversary of the military coup. The reuniting or retelling, in one place and in English, of this long series of quite complex events – including the ‘Pinochet case’, extensive domestic trials, and a second Truth Commission – is in itself valuable. It will doubtless give the book interest and utility as a teaching or reference text, since Chile remains one of the standard case studies in the transitional justice field, and in Latin American studies in general.

Analytically, however, the book feels at times like something of a missed opportunity. Many developments are narrated rather than explained. When explanation or

interpretation is attempted, a relatively small range of sources and figures is relied upon. The accounts provided by some of these sources and interviewees, while superficially satisfactory, might give pause to any more critically or politically minded insider. The omission of any directly or indeed indirectly cited views from survivors' groups, activists, or political actors beyond the usual suspects may be symptomatic here; many sources cited are former truth commissioners, retired senior staff members from government agencies, and a handful of undeniably respected expert scholars, often themselves heavily involved and invested in the phenomena they discuss. In general the number and type of interviews carried out (no more than 15, several by e-mail) seems striking given the innately (re)interpretive nature of the challenge posed by any and all attempts to generate worthwhile new knowledge about such well-known, and extensively studied, cases.

While some of the methodological problems arising in qualitative studies of this sort, such as causal indeterminacy or omitted common causes, are correctly identified, it is not as evident that they are satisfactorily resolved. Some discussion of the capacities and limitations of single-case study, or of the possibilities offered by process tracing or other available techniques, might have enhanced the broader transferability of the endeavour (see, for example, methodological considerations in Ezequiel González's exemplary recent work on atrocity crime prosecutions in three Latin American jurisdictions). Instead, the subsequent substantive chapters of the present book do sometimes stray toward making broad assertions, or implicit assumptions, about the extent and the ways in which events that fall into a narrative sequence are or must be causally connected. The decision to use a basically chronological framing within the thematic focus of each chapter perhaps contributes to this.

Such a relatively well-known and fairly frequently re-told story could perhaps have been more synthetically treated, leaving space for more grappling with disciplinary and indeed epistemological debates about how we can evaluate commissions' effects, and on the basis of what evidence. An early reference to the useful distinction, introduced by Eric Wiebelhaus-Brahm, *inter alia*, between immediate success and long-term impact of a commission, fades from view as impact is nowhere robustly defined or operationalised. Nor, more strikingly, is there much discussion of the distinct types, registers, objects and groundings of the claims, exhortations, and recommendations made in Chile's original 'Rettig' Truth Commission report. The relationship between Commission findings and subsequent judicial activity is, to this reviewer's mind, overstated in at least two senses. First, both phenomena – supposedly bare-bones factual Commission narratives about particular incidents, on the one hand, and case verdicts which establish specific judicial truths to which consequences are attached, on the other – in fact draw on earlier, uniquely detailed, documentation amassed by a Church-sponsored human rights organisation with national reach, as the author herself acknowledges.

Second, the particular judicial system in question is a written, inquisitorial, system, which proceeds through the amassing of a compendious judicial record. Such systems are particularly expansive in terms of what can be admitted, in the first instance, to this record, as has been well documented by Antonio Cassese, Richard A. Wilson and others. Thus the mere presence of such accounts in the investigatory process – even their inclusion or citation in final verdicts, where they are sometimes used as a shorthand by judges setting out factual outlines before going on to construct and justify a ruling – does not necessarily signal any special evidentiary utility. Ongoing studies by Daniela Accatino, an expert on the law of evidence in domestic cases, will soon provide

us with a much more detailed guide as to how significant, and how irreplaceable or otherwise, truth commission materials have been in domestic atrocity jurisprudence in Chile. We already know, however, that direct witness testimony, and exhaustive re-examination of contemporaneous court, human rights organisation, and forensic records have been equally if not more central to the current prosecution universe.

Discussion of reliance on Rettig Commission material by Spanish courts (in Chapter 5) should perhaps treat overseas domestic courts as ‘third-country’, rather than as international, courts. It should also be borne in mind that the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, also mentioned in the chapter, has no mandate to pronounce directly on the substance of criminal cases at all, being solely concerned with ruling on state compliance or otherwise with regional Convention obligations. These observations weaken the book’s contention that ‘late justice’ in Chile is in essence built on the foundations provided by its Truth Commission efforts. Any such contention with regard to the ‘Valech Commission’ – Chile’s second Truth Commission, which documented recognised cases of survivors of torture – is moreover untenable since an explicit 50-year embargo on public, including judicial, use of Commission materials was built into its legal mandate. This characteristic should perhaps have been mentioned in the book’s discussion of this commission. Overall, while there are useful accounts here of recent developments in one of the classic transitional justice case studies, the challenge of crafting a transferable framework for evaluating truth commission impact remains.

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Luis van Isschot, *The Social Origins of Human Rights: Protesting Political Violence in Colombia’s Oil Capital, 1919–2010* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), pp. xxviii + 297, \$39.95 pb, \$34.95 E-book.

Luis van Isschot makes a remarkable contribution to the field of twentieth-century Colombian history with his book, *The Social Origins of Human Rights: Protesting Political Violence in Colombia’s Oil Capital, 1919–2010*. This book is a masterful narrative that interweaves and integrates the history of Colombia’s iconic oil capital, Barrancabermeja, with the history of human rights in Colombia. Van Isschot’s central argument is that the history of human rights movements must be written from the local context and from the ground up. While he does not discount the importance of international actors and of the global context that allowed for human rights movements in Colombia to gain recognition and legitimacy in the 1980s, van Isschot demonstrates persuasively that human rights activism during the decade of the 2000s in Barrancabermeja was fundamentally shaped by the city’s long history of civic and union activism.

The book’s first chapter begins by providing the early history of the region of Magdalena Medio, where Barrancabermeja is located, to explain how this town and region were located on the periphery and on the frontier of Colombia’s nation-state formation. The author then focuses on how Barrancabermeja from 1910 to the 1960s became a place of vibrant union activism and of nationalist politics; Tropical Oil Company’s dominant presence in the region as a major foreign economic actor facilitated the unionisation of workers because of the enclave type of social and economic relations in the region. Indeed, van Isschot points out that Tropical Oil