

*Politiques de la mémoire et résolution des conflits*. By Jean-Serge Massamba-Makoumbou. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012. Pp. 313. 30.40euros

Memory, and particularly the interplay between memory and post-conflict politics, has long been a subject of preoccupation among French academics. A refreshing recent addition to this already well-debated field is Jean-Serge Massamba-Makoumbou's *Politiques de la mémoire et résolution des conflits*.

The book's primary contribution to the memory debate stems from its temporal focus. Whereas the majority of French language work considers memory in conjunction with the legacies in Europe of World Wars One and Two, Massamba-Makoumbou analyses the role of memory politics in societies emerging from violence in the twenty-first century. Examining this later epoch allows the author access to a variety of information from which to formulate his theories: he is able to draw on information related to earlier conflicts, take heed of recent developments in the field of memory studies, and consider conflicts encompassing a wide geographical area (while Massamba-Makoumbou's main focus is Africa, he also refers to Europe and South America). This broad scope of material has resulted in an original perspective on the relationship between violence, memory and politics.

The theoretical advantage presented by Massamba-Makoumbou's unusual temporal focus is most obviously manifest in his clear and original delineation of what he perceives as constituting 'memory politics' (this definition constitutes another of the author's welcome contributions to the field of memory studies). Having devoted the entirety of Part One to developing a definition, Massamba-Makoumbou concludes that memory politics are the institutions put in place to bring peace and reconciliation to a society in change, normally after violence. Following this idea, the theoretical foundation of memory politics is threefold, encompassing the state's monopoly of legitimate violence, the state's duty to protect and provide security for people within its jurisdiction, and the gradual spread of democracy with its violence-detering institutions (52-54).

According to Massamba-Makoumbou, memory politics as we currently understand them were institutionalised following World War Two as a means of preventing people from forgetting about the extermination of Europe's Jews (30). Yet the author stipulates that memory politics, defined as mechanisms intended to pacify a society in change, have a long history and were in the past enacted through amnesties, pardons and prescription. Such practices are today out of favour, however. Experience has demonstrated that excusing wrongdoers does not adequately allow society to come to terms with the past; rather, society must face and work through trauma and division in order for true reconciliation to occur (94).

Recognition of the social need for mourning and truth has resulted in the development of the mechanisms of 'modern' memory politics. Within this category, Massamba-Makoumbou identifies institutions such as the International Criminal Court, established by the Rome Convention of 1998, Truth Commissions and other mechanisms put in place to try and bring war criminals to justice. As well as tracing the historical origins of such mechanisms, he

looks critically at their effectiveness and raises the possibility that attempts at justice can in fact contribute to the re-emergence of violence, for example if the judicial system is weak or lacking in resources.

Massamba-Makoumbou also brings the reader's attention to what he terms the "limits of political and moral culpability" (124) - the verity that punishing individuals responsible for committing the crimes does nothing to change the structural cause of violence inherent within the society. The revival of traditional local reconciliation techniques in many places around the world can be seen as an attempt to complement - or attempt to rectify the failings of - national-level institutions.

*Politiques de la mémoire et résolution des conflits* pays tribute to the work of great French memory scholars such as Pierre Nora, Marie-Claire Lavabre, Paul Ricoeur and Maurice Halbwachs. Yet the book's twenty-first century focus has allowed the author, Jean-Serge Massamba-Makoumbou, to approach the investigation into the relationship between memory, conflict and politics from an unusual perspective. The result is an innovative and enlightening contribution to this fascinating subject.

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