

Historical Justice and Memory. Edited by Klaus Neumann and Janna Thompson. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015. Pp. 258. US\$39.95 paper.

This volume represents a timely and long overdue contribution to the rather uneven and difficult relationship between the memory of human rights violations and accountability measures aimed towards addressing historical wrongs. Thus, the eleven chapters attempt to explain why issues of reckoning with particular past instances of repression are no longer confined to understanding the immediate aftermath of an authoritarian regime or a civil or military conflict, but are addressed at an intergenerational level and incorporated in the work of civil society activists and academics. Or, by using Jan Assman's well-known distinction, questions of retroactive compensatory justice are no longer limited to the victims, survivors, and witnesses of the repression engaged in direct remembrance ("communicative memory"): instead, such claims extend to their descendants, specific groups, and larger communities ("cultural memory").¹ In broader methodological and theoretical terms, as Klaus Neuman and Janna Thompson state in the Introduction, this book aims to link and overcome the disciplinary boundaries between transitional justice and memory studies under the umbrella of *historical memory*. The contributors to the volume - well-established scholars from a variety of academic fields including philosophy, political science, history, sociology, semiotics and journalism - are fully successful in undertaking this task. Their multifaceted analyses covering theoretical, legal, political, cultural and sociological issues as well as broad geographical and regional comparisons and particular case studies, make a compelling argument in favor of historical justice studies.

Chapters 1, 2 and 4 written by Andreas Huyssen, Janna Thompson, and Jeffrey Blustein lay the ground by examining the normative implications of engaging with the problematic of historical justice and memory. Huyssen discusses the important role of memory politics in ensuring future human rights. But he also warns about the potential consequences of certain types of memory politics, which may or can lead to further human rights violations. This is especially the case when one group memory is pitted against another's. In order to avoid such a scenario Huyssen recommends that "both memory and rights discourse need to nurture a universalizing dimension that recognizes particularity without reifying it" (Huyssen, 1, 43). Thompson also addresses the relationship between human rights and memory by stressing how a group's experiences of historical injustices affects later generations in its development and negatively affects its identity. Often, she argues, the heirs of collectivities, which have been subject to past oppression, continue to be stigmatized. As a result, such groups continue to lack equal opportunities in their respective societies. Given this, Thompson advocates a combination of reparative

and social justice measures. In doing so, she challenges traditional liberal conceptions of social justice that emphasize the redistributive character of these measures situated outside a historical context. In chapter 4, Blustein expands upon the idea of historical memory as a joint commitment by connecting it with an ethics of remembrance. He shows that such an ethics represents more than an attempt at preventing past violations from recurring. In order to establish empathy and respect for the subjects of memorialization a collective effort to develop shared emotions among members of a society is crucial. John Torpey's chapter 3 – *The Political Field of Reparations* - analyses how contemporary understandings of memory and human rights have contributed to a fundamental shift in ways in which international law conceptualizes reparations. Before World War Two reparations involved the obligation of states to repay countries for damage inflicted in on them in war. In contrast, the obligation to restore and compensate victims of conflict has more recently been framed in terms of individual human rights. This change reflects a new conception of looking at social life and human relationships. Since the United Nations began to incorporate this broader conception dealing with historical injustices in its policies, new expectations have arisen. However, Torpey rightly points out that claims of reparation are always politicized and therefore remain contentious and difficult to pursue.

In fact, the case studies pursued by Elazar Barkan and Belma Bećirbašić on the post-conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina in chapter 5, on the 2007 Spanish law of historical memory by Patrizia Violi in chapter 6, on historical justice in the post-colonial context by Daniel Butt in chapter 9, and on contemporary terrorism in Japan authored by Mark Pendleton in chapter 11, bring further insight to the politicization of reparations in specific historical contexts. Barkan's and Bećirbašić's examination of currently unresolved historical disputes among the three main religious and ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats - shows how long-standing unresolved conflicts threaten peace and stability. They provide an excellent analysis of the power of nationalist actors in misusing and exploiting the rhetoric of victimization for political gain exacerbating sectarian tensions. Equally insightful is Violi's analysis of the Spanish case. She shows why the 1977 amnesty law passed after the Spanish civil war with the aim of securing reconciliation did not result in forgiveness and forgetting. Violi's distinction between transition as an event (political transition) and transition as a process (cultural transformation) is crucial in contextualizing the Law of Historical Memory. Butt supports the condemnation of historical colonialism and the pro-reparation argument by Western former colonial powers and the international community by pointing out that at present the deeply uneven distribution of resources between developed and developing countries represents a

fundamental aspect of unequal power relationships. Pendleton's chapter on Japan brings a somewhat different methodological approach to the study of memory. He uses autobiographical narratives in order to emphasize how different understandings of past abuses leads to different notions of justice (retributive versus reconciliatory). He examines the case of a small sect (Aum Shinrikyō) that was involved in domestic terrorism in the 1980's and 1990's.

Scholars and activists interested in concrete policy strategies should turn to chapters 7, 8, and 10. They discuss distinctive historical justice methods that could potentially be utilized in dealing with long-term or protracted conflicts. These include the following: truth telling as reparations (chapter 7, Margaret Urban Walker); truth commissions (chapter 8, Onur Bakiner); and historical dialogue (chapter 10, Elazar Barkan). Walker provides a useful overview of how rights to know the truth have been defined in 2006 by the United Nations. She emphasizes how such an articulation of redress indicates the expressive dimension of reparations. The specific mandate of truth commissions focused on understanding the conflict and acknowledging the victims are suitable for achieving these goals (Bakiner). Barkan's chapter advances historical dialogue as an alternative to peace building and transitional justice. By promoting dialogue between parties, the advantage of historical dialogue is that it goes beyond both peace-building (focusing on reconciliation) and transitional justice (primarily concerned with accountability). However, the challenge here is for both scholars and activists to promote a historical dialogue "as countermeasures to nationalist Ideology" (Barkan, 10, 200).

Given the multitude of current ethnic, religious and sectarian long-term and protracted conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and the former Soviet Union this book is essential for both academics and practitioners of human rights.

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¹ Jan Assman, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011