

**Marc Ferro, (trans. Steven Rendall), *Resentment in history*, Polity, Cambridge, 2010. Paperback; 150 pages; 5 illustrations; RRP A\$32
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Despite globalization, and maybe because of it, there is a perception that ethnic and religious hatreds seem to be increasing in extent and frequency. This makes Marc Ferro's 'Resentment in History' especially relevant, and thus its sometimes poor translation a real pity. Ferro provides a snapshot of a number of significant current and past conflicts, using resentment as his lens. He explores the events and context of each conflict with usually just enough detail to make his point. The book is suitable for the average reader or undergraduate and covers enough ground to give readers scope for further research.

The book comprises a series of five separate papers which would have benefited from a more adequate introductory chapter that explains Ferro's definition of resentment and his thesis of the role of anger and resentment in creating and perpetuating conflict. For example, I searched in vain inside the book for a definition of 'resentment' and how the author understands it in history. Strangely, the best definition is on the back cover; the three paragraphs there should have been included in an introduction. Instead, the first chapter acts as the entrée by surveying the last 2000 years of history, especially discussing Greek slaves, heretics and Jews, looking for evidence of resentment as the motivating force for human action. This is the weakest chapter because at points it glosses over details and fails to show in what way resentment contributed to various events. The reader is left with vague implications and trends but not enough data to draw solid conclusions. Ferro's discussion of Christianity is particularly weak, and he distorts Donatist thinking, succumbing to the fad of locating anti-Roman identity politics as an issue, but fails to understand that there were Donatists in Rome itself.

The chapters on French, Polish, German and Russian resentments are much better, and contain helpful summaries of key events and occasional quotes which demonstrate the elements of revenge and resentment. Ferro maps the growth of out-of-control popular resentment in each case, and analyses the impact of resentment especially on the elites. His grasp of historic trends is good and these chapters explain social contexts and personalities quite well.

Ferro's chapter on post-colonial resentment is possibly the best, placing many twentieth century conflicts in a broader historic context. The section on various Black power and Latin American movements raises some good points and questions but is too short. Discussing the elements of Islamic memory and the longevity of resentment would have strengthened Ferro's argument, for example. Nevertheless, Ferro's understanding of the role of humiliation in modern Islam is especially insightful, although he oversimplifies at points. For example, his discussion of fundamentalist Islam ignores many issues that contributed to resentment, and he reduces the causes of various conflicts to simply anger. His claim that Iran was one of the places least 'contaminated by European expansion' (p. 121) overlooks Iran's very Western culture in the 1940s, and glosses over the British and US involvement in destabilizing and then overthrowing the democratic Iranian government of 1953. Yemen and Oman would have been better examples of 'less contaminated' countries.

The brief conclusion chapter makes some telling points about 'impotent anger' and 'reciprocal' anger (pp. 128-129), although these definitional sections would have been best in an introduction. The final paragraphs about the South African Peace and Reconciliation Commission could have been enlarged to cover more evidences of how resentments have been defused in history.

Overall this is a helpful although at times frustrating book, mainly due to the quality of translation and patchiness of depth and evidence. Some sections of the five chapter book flow well and present a compelling case for resentment as a key factor in history, while some parts are hard to understand due to peculiar translations like 'resentment ... secreted a true reaction' (p. 5). Especially distorting is the statement on p.8 that the Jews rejected Christ because 'for them God incarnated omnipotence'. This is precisely not what Jews believe about God- Jews believe that God cannot be

incarnate, and it is likely that the translator meant to indicate that God 'embodies'/exemplifies omnipotence (or else Ferro completely misunderstands Judaism). Overall however, the translation quality is merely confusing or distracting. Ferro has some good insights which could have been better served by greater depth and tighter editing. This is not a brilliant book, but for anyone wanting a quick introduction to resentment as a cause for conflict it is useful.