

## Reviews

International Journal of Francophone Studies Volume 18 Number 4

© 2015 Intellect Ltd

Reviews. English language. doi: 10.1386/ijfs.18.4.509\_5

pp. 536-8.

***After 'Rwanda'. In Search of a New Ethic, Jean-Paul Martinon (2013)***

Amsterdam: Rodopi, 308 pp., ISBN: 9789042037113, p/bk, £58.50

*Reviewed by Daniele Rugo, Brunel University*

Martinon's book covers a vast and diverse territory. Since what attracted me to this work was the Levinasian framework alluded to in the subtitle, the scope of this review remains limited. The hope is that what cannot be 'reviewed' could nonetheless be done justice to by being viewed for the first time. What can be said from this partial position is that following Lyotard's analysis of communication (developed out of the syllable mat [36]) and crossing intellectual continents as well as calling the reader to a different kind of attention (a Levinasian one), Martinon's volume confronts the uniqueness of the Rwandan genocide through the words of a witness, Emilienne Kwibanda.

The book seems to ask us to move somewhere beyond its title. Thus 'After Rwanda' becomes the question of how to think the genocide not as a historical event behind us and to which we can turn, but as something as important as the 'latest urgency' (13). Rwanda – 'neither a concept nor a model' (15) – is something towards which, in this book, we tend. As a consequence what the book asks is to think Rwanda now, as if nothing happened after 'Rwanda' happened. Rwanda continues and goes on with an undiminished urgency. In this sense the 'after' of the title provides a key to understanding the book, to follow its demand and from there to listen to what the book itself responds to. To think after something does not mean to think the event's aftermath, legacy or consequence. It means to bring the event across time and through a split in time to let it occupy a new 'now'. To let thinking be preoccupied, fashioned, hollowed out by the event it thinks; to let thinking become passible to it. To think after is to think first of all, the beginning and not the end, for Rwanda, the book suggests, remains without closure. To think after Rwanda is then to think not the consolation that something is finally over, that the worst is behind us, time will heal, history will judge, but the taking place that has not ceased *taking place*, an insistence that won't quite go away. The name of Emmanuel Levinas, whom Martinon takes as one of the crucial intellectual figures in the book, is the name that has thought this after that becomes now, after as the disruption of

temporality. One could even say that 'after' becomes for Levinas *philosophia prima*, indicating both the primacy of the event over the concept and the impossibility of placing of the past in the past. But then Levinas' after is also the thought that doesn't leave one in peace, because it names a uniqueness whose force exceeds recognition and paradoxically tends towards the universal outside of generality. The logic at stake here, in Martinon's transformation of Levinas (but also of Derrida and of Rwandese philosophers Alexis Kagame and Maniragaba Balibusta) intimates that Rwanda 'prescribes or commands uniquely' (15) and this uniqueness prescribes what and whom the book encounters. As Martinon writes 'the topic itself dictates the sources' (29).

The book's early identification of Levinas' influence on its argument is then an opening towards questions that go well beyond the proper name 'Levinas': speaking to the other, speaking in a fracture, speaking violence/ peace, philosophy under the weight of 'non-cognitive significance' (40), receiving the word of the witness (this book is first of all the record of the author's encounter with Emilienne, a survivor of the genocide) to hear that of another witness (the author's grandmother, who escaped from Ravensbrück in April 1945).

Levinas is also the philosophical name that speaks the deposition of philosophical language in front of the witness. However, the philosophical idiom is overcome not beyond language, but by giving it its due. By appropriating this gesture the book attempts to let Rwanda (in Emilienne's voice, the sound of violence/peace) speak after philosophy. This way a space is opened for Emilienne to say and through this saying for the argument to wrestle itself away from mere application. If this wrestling itself is the new ethics that never 'arrives', a vigilance that includes 'an incalculable risk' (258), its 'after' would be a listening, leaning on the one who speaks in the hope that we can hear the words. Towards the end of the volume Martinon asks 'what is one to make of this way of circumscribing this encounter between Emilienne and I in Kigali on 6 September 2006?' (270) And the answer reads: 'a reaffirmation of limits' (280) that allows 'peace to remain this enigmatic advent always already on our hands' (280). The result is not then the application of Levinas to Rwanda or the verification of the former by the latter, but a much more risky, ambitious and rewarding exercise. As such it is one that is conducted at the limit, 'after' all.

Contact: School of Arts, Film and TV, Gaskell Building 106, Brunel University, Uxbridge, UB8 3PH, UK. E-mail: [daniele.rugo@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:daniele.rugo@brunel.ac.uk)