

Work on Memory in post genocide Rwanda in Churches and Community-based organizations: A Historical encounter for a listening and learning process

Joint Consultation and Colloquium PIASS-KwaZulu Natal

Part II: Huye-Butare 17-20 March 2019

In Huye about 50 academics, leaders and members of community-based organizations met in a three days' colloquium on the theme: ***Work on memory in post-genocide Rwanda in churches and community-based organizations***. The question to address by the Huye 17-20 March 2019 colloquium was: what can institutions like the academia and the churches do to help people appropriate their shared history and to develop consensually a common identity out of a wounded memory? What can be the contribution of individual components of society in such ambitious enterprise? The colloquium recognized that research and Praxis should lead to walk Hand in Hand toward cooperation between the academia and community-based organizations. Memory deals with existential issues in a broken fabric of society; hence the government should aim at harmonizing the policies to help the people journey toward a common future.



Vue of the participants at the conference at PIASS Conference Hall with the Vice chancellor of PIASS, Rev. Prof Elisee Musemakweli, fourth from Right



Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of PIASS, Prof Penine Uwimbabazi, during the opening remarks of the conference, Sunday 17 March 2019

I. Understanding memory and policing for memory

The tricky issue of teaching history [Dusingizemungu; Ndikumana; Denis]

During the inaugural presentation, Prof ViateurNdikumana [Christian University of East Africa] said that memory invites to the commemoration of traumatic founding common events like the genocide, experienced together by a group of human community; such an event is the occasion to question their identity and to ask existential questions. The importance of memory was elaborated from the first half of the 20th century by sociologies and philosophers including, Henri Bergson(1939), Maurice Halbwachs (1950),TzvetanTodorov (1995) and Paul Ricœur (2000). For most of them, memory is not only the reading of past historic events; it impacts on present human action as it helps to apprehend the self-consciousness, to create own identity and often to elaborate political ideologies (Ndikumana paper). Manipulated memory is terrible

cause of tragedies like the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda [Ricoeur 2000]. Teaching history in a society, traumatized and divided by the genocide is one of the riskiest enterprises [Dusingizemungu]. History in Rwanda was deliberately misinterpreted by colonial empires' ideologists and propagandists against the social and political reality. By ascribing the populations in so-called "races", "ethnic groups" and "tribes", colonial system and Christian missionaries denied the unity and social interactions among the Banyarwanda. Though the Banyarwanda people fulfill all the conditions for a nation – same language, same culture, same social and political reality, same mythical ancestors, same geographical location- many ethnologists and anthropologists made schools of social constructs over the supposed differences between the three social classes inhabiting the land [Dusingizemungu]. In Rwanda, given a long succession of violent events, including but not restricted to the genocide against the Tutsi, memories are difficult to handle; they are particularly painful and particularly contested. Therefore, because of existence of diverse and often competing narratives of the past [Denis's paper], and also because of intergenerational transmission of memory, policing becomes particularly important.

And yet, how to proceed? Different scholars have criticized the government of Rwanda as promoting a collective memory through annual genocide commemorations (Vidal, 2001). Some scholars have regarded the annual commemoration as 'enforced memory' which 'helps nurture ethnic enmities' (Lemarchand, 2009, p. 105). Without discussing these criticisms, the contributors in the colloquium, pose questions on the existence versus the enforcement of memory and its policy demands as a natural logic that apply in the case of Rwanda. The work of reconstruction and rehabilitation of the fabric of society as opposed to hugely exaggerated supposed parallel memories. Memory is an active process of reconstruction of the past, at the individual and collective levels, with a view to producing meaning for the present. Like every society that experienced long succession of violent events, memories are difficult to handle because they are particularly painful and particularly contested, particularly by those who have a lot to hide; and like them, Rwanda too adopted a policy of memory keen not to impose anyone view, but to harmonize competing narratives for a nation to walk sustainably towards a common future.

II. Pilgrimage in Community-based organisations

On the second day of the colloquium, the participants dispersed in three groups spent half a day visiting and interacting with community – based organisations working in healing traumatic and wounded memories. The aim of this exercise was to initiate a dialogue between researchers and academia on one hand, and the community-based organisations through a listening and learning process. Three organisations were instrumental in offering this opportunity: the Association AMI Huye-Butare organized an encounter between the participants and one of its group made of survivors of the genocide and some of the former

prisoners convicted of the genocide who confessed and repented. The second organization is the MDHF which works to relieve and heal the traumas of the survivors of the genocide, accompanying them, particularly during the commemoration period.



In three groups participants made a day pilgrimage within community-based organisations- Here a group photo during site visits, at Umucyo- Nyanza, Monday 18 March 2019

The third association is Umucyo Nyanza, a group of 14 women, 7 survivors of genocide and 7 women, wives of prisoners who perpetrated the genocide. These groups have for common denominator to have initiated joint activities promoting practical reconciliation and well-being of their families. Facilitated by agencies of reconciliation the two sides had to overcome sharp emotions and strong feeling of enmity to walk a journey that took them where they are now. Umucyo Nyanza wives of the genocide prisoners asked forgiveness on behalf of their husbands, but they had first to secure the authorization of the later also confessed and repented.

III. Memory in Religious Communities

Churches moves at odds with Grassroots experiences

Other issues discussed during the colloquium includes confessing and repenting the guilt of the omission and by Christians and churches (Gatwa). For Churches as an institution, facing the guilt, confessing and repentance was slow to ponder. The movement was pioneered by some lay persons [Saarbruken group

1994; Detmold December 1995 and then December 1996 [Gatwa 2001;2005]. The Presbyterian church of Rwanda was the first church to confess and repent during its General Synod December 1996. In June 2004, many different delegations from the ecumenical family upon visiting Rwanda, published the Kigali Covenant, a powerful message confessing and repenting for abandoning Rwandans at the time their solidarity and compassion were needed. In 2014, both protestant and catholic hierarchies concluded a three days retreat in Musanze by a powerful confession and repentance asking forgiveness to God, to the survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi and to all Banyarwanda. *Then in October 2016* the Roman catholic bishops published their own confession; in March 2017 during an audience given to the president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame and his wife, Pope Francis said sorry on behalf of the Church of Rwanda and its clergy for letting down the people of Rwanda during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Tharcisse Gatwa in his paper during the conference, discusses the central issue inspired by the above confessions: why does it take too long for churches to confess and repent in Rwanda and wherever she is confronted with guilt?

The participants shared and interacted on experiences of work from community based-organisations from reports on trauma counseling programs by the Protestant council of Rwanda (Jael Nirere paper); in the Bible Society of Rwanda (Therese Mukamakuza paper); education and preventive approaches adopted by *Never Again* (Florence Batoni paper); healing and counseling strategies used by Socioterapy based Community (Chantal Ingabire paper); field visits to groups of reconciliation by the Association Modeste Innocent, UMUCYO Nyanza and the MHDF].

IV. Memory and Emotions

Intergenerational transmission of memories in post genocide Rwanda

This study conducted by a research team of sociotherapists, Dr Chantal Marie **Ingabire**, Grace Kagoyire, Nicolas Habarugira, Theoneste Rutayisire & Annemiek Richters from the Community Based Socioterapy explored parent-child communication patterns with regard to genocide, its impact and contribution of sociotherapy program- a trauma informed approach that promotes healing, social cohesion and reconciliation- in breaking the cycle of violence. This study presented in the colloquium by Dr Chantal Ingabire was based on interviews conducted in the Western and Eastern provinces of Rwanda in 2016 among the descendants of survivors and perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi, the researchers presented findings suggesting that the lack of parent-child communication with regard to parental genocide experiences for both descendants of survivors and perpetrators; the findings proved the eagerness of children to know the past. The little disclosed by parents and/or learnt from the environment was found associated with traumatic symptoms among the youth. They propose a modulated disclosure is

therefore suggested to mediate the potential negative effects of disclosure of the painful past. In addition, they propose to target youth with tailored psychosocial programs such as spaces for dialogue that promote mutual learning, understanding as well as trust in peer relationships for sustainable peace and development is needed.

Intergenerational transmission...Targeting Youth in healing processes

Targeting youth in the healing process is an approach valued by sociotherapy in the interventions implemented in the post genocide Rwanda in order to help Rwandans deal with the past painful history. The findings of this study conducted by another team of six sociotherapists ,Grace **Kagoyire**, Emmanuel Nzabonimpa, Noella Ingabire, Diogene Karangwa, Chantal Marie Ingabire & Annemiek Richters were presented by Nicolas Habarugira; they later show that commemoration of the 1994 Genocide is beneficial for both youth and adults in terms of remembering the country history and identification of ways to positively move forward. For the youth, participation in commemoration related activities enabled them learning the country's history but also reminding them their responsibility in restoring peace. Decentralization of commemoration activities at the village level played a role in decreasing genocide ideology and facilitated inclusive community participation in commemoration activities. Findings also show that sociotherapy contributed to the reduction of trauma crisis often experienced and fear towards the "other" and participants were enabled to willingly attend commemoration events.

Mourning and memory based culture: factor of expression and management of emotions due to the loss

This study conducted and presented by Dr Augustin Nshimiyimana summarises its doctoral dissertation in clinical psychology. It starts from the observation that the genocide against the Tutsi did not allow the accomplishment of the mourningrite towards the deceased; it discusses different steps of mourning and funeral rituals based on Rwandan culture and finally the attempts to recreate and restore the ritual of mourning and memory after the genocide. The contribution highlighted the way the ritual should start from culture and adapt to the current environment in order to be more dynamic in the psychic reconstruction of the humans' community. Funeral and memorial rites are an opportunity to say goodbye to the deceased, but also to manage different emotions generated by the loss which facilitates the smooth running of the work of mourning.

V. Comparative perspectives

For both Jean Ndorimana and Jean Marc Trouille, the similarities between the genocide against the Tutsi and the Jewish Holocaust are troubling, whether in the preparation, the execution and

the aftermath. For Ndurimana, the Nuremberg laws in 1935, and the triple Decalogue of the Bahutu in 1959, 1990 and 1993, the execution and elimination illustrate these facts. The Neo-Nazis exist in Europe as the neo-genocidaires operate in Europe and Africa. Equally, the causes and slowing down of the demands and concessions of pardon are similar. Proper request for forgiveness has taken too long to come from the Roman Catholic Church of Rwanda as it was for the Vatican; and the rise of punishment of the pedophile clergy members must be taken for example to call upon urgent actions needed against any members of the clergy who have been involved in the genocide, in relation with the 1366 Canon law.

During the colloquium, the participants interacted on the paper written for the Conference by , Rodney Petersen, Executive Director of the Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, Boston, USA and presented by Prof Philippe Denis [South Africa], "Memory and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America", bringing in memory great moments of the struggle for civil rights movement, particularly within African-American and vivid memory still of how to manage the memorials of the heralds of White supremacy in the USA.

Discussions also showed that Reconciliation processes between Christian churches and Jewish communities in America [USA] and in Europe not only for the Holocaust, but for many centuries of pogroms and persecutions against the Jewish from the High Middle Ages, up to the Reformation anti-Jewish rhetoric of Martin Luther [see his 1543 pamphlet], surely Europe too has lessons to learn from societies like Rwanda which continue to turn upside down earth and heavens to make healing wounded memory and reconciliation possible (Dieter Brandes).



During a presentation- Here Dieter Brandes from Germany shares experiences of Memory of the Jewish Holocaust and pogroms in Europe

Dr Helen Trouille from York St John University, in the UK reflected on the background of empire and historic wars and conquests of the English against their former enemies on the European continent but also past British empire, then extrapolated on the root causes of the Brexit that is turning apart the United Kingdom, opposing viscerally the Brexiters and the Remainers, even dividing families and communities. Drawing the lessons from Rwandan success stories in the reconciliation journey, she urged all parts in her country find ways and means for reconciliation.

Prof Jean Marc Trouille from Bradford University, UK but originally from France, sees the evolution of the Franco-German relations as a good lesson in the search of a sustainable answer to the crisis in the Great Lakes Region. He writes: "France and Germany share a chequered history punctuated by hostilities and conflicts. In 400 years 23 wars were fought between French and Germans, culminating in three major conflicts between 1870 and 1945, which generated vivid memories on both sides of the Rhine. The post-1945 French and German leaders had the wisdom to work together in overcoming this difficult past, choosing the path of reconciliation, friendship and cooperation, and built a unique relationship which has been the cement of European integration. Revisiting the Franco-German relations in a historical perspective helps to examine the nature of shared memories, assess the role played by remembrance and joint commemorative practices, powerful initiatives in the construction of post-war reconciliation. The Contributors to this comparative perspective drew a parallel between the Franco-German relations with the "post-conflict Rwanda which has become a beacon of stability, keen to contribute towards closer cooperation and regional integration in the East African Community and in Africa as a whole" [JM Trouille; see also Rainer Schmidt, Helen Trouille].

VI. Follow-up of the cooperation

The participants at the conference resolved among themselves to pursue the cooperation in research and publication on the work on memory, healing and reconciliation. The final copies of the papers presented in the conference are expected by end of May 2019 for editing process and publication.

Between the two-co-organising universities, an MOU was signed to strengthen ties for the pursuit of cooperation inaugurated



During the Colloquium, the signing of an MOU between the Protestant University of Rwanda [PUR] and the University of Kwazulu Natal [UKZN]. Here the Vice Chancellor of PIASS, Rev Prof Elisee Musemakweli signing as witnesses looked at, on his right Prof Kumalo Singamaliso from UKZN, and Prof Tharcisse Gatwa from PUR and in his left Prof Penine Uwimbabazi, PUR and Prof Philippe Denis, UKZN before signing at themselves.



Prof Philippe Denis receiving the instruments of the MOU on behalf of the Vice Chancellor of UKZN.

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