

When the Academia, Churches and Community-based organizations walk hand in hand to promote healed collective memory in Rwanda

Joint Consultation and Colloquium PIASS-KwaZulu Natal

Part I: Kigali 29-30 November 2018

As Rwanda prepare to commemorate the 25 anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi, the Protestant University of Rwanda [PIASS, Huye-Butare], in cooperation with the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa co-organised two important events about the work on memory in post genocide Rwanda in churches and community – based organizations, Kigali 29-30 November 2018; and Huye 17-20 March 2019. The question these institutions vowed to address 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?

Pioneering the encounter between the academia and communities working on memory and trauma healing: the 29-30 November 2018 Consultation

In Kigali, about 20 academics met and explored all the complexities of the issue of memory in a post genocide society like Rwanda, and post conflict society like South Africa. One of the major recommendation of the Kigali consultation urged the researchers and academics should work hand in hand with community-based organisations which are working in moral rearmament, healing and reconciliation, so that research done and published are resourced in the reality of the day by day life of communities.

Understanding memory-

In a post-genocide society like Rwanda, and post-conflict like South Africa is key to apprehending policy and decision making process concerned with healing, reconciliation and reconstruction in society. Policies of memory should be concerned with the harmonization of differences and singularities, a role that needs to be fulfilled jointly by the state, private and public organizations including faith-based organizations together with communities. Memory is a collection relatively stable set of beliefs, values, know-how, representations and shared events between the members of human groups; that set is ascribed durably, not only in the minds but in commonly materialized space by texts, tools, monuments, memorization techniques, etc. Collective memory is not static; it is oriented toward the future.

Politicizing traumatic memories engender fear, rumor, panic-

Memories that traumatic and politicised generate an atmosphere of confusion resulting in rumors, panics, conspiracy theories, true or false attacks and counter attacks, etc. Central to the process is the management of collective memory in a post genocide like Rwanda, and post ideological and racial conflict like South Africa. Work on memory should then aim at reaching a therapeutic end not only to comfort individuals but society even international community; this is so because the international

community as a collective body has a memory which has been manipulated, abused and failed to challenge the planners and organizers of the genocide.

A consensus: “the purification of memory”

In Kigali, participants reached a consensus in the following: a. obstacle of common memory include: cultural factors; b. fear; c. fragility of the idea of nation in some societies; d. absence of political maturity; e. absence of credible scientific research on history ; e. absence of critical thinking; f. feeling of being victims of injustice by a fraction of community; g. absence of spaces of democratic interaction and critical analysis of the politics and cultural heritages, hence the critical role to be fulfilled by social and cultural organisations; h. the impact of group ideologies and previous experiences of unhealed wounded memories in intergenerational transmission of memory and history facts; the role of external environment. Measures to be taken will have to overcome these challenges; they will have to create political and civic system of democratic critical thinking that aims at “purifying memory”.The concept of “purification of memory” was initiated by Pope John Paul II in 2000 when the church was celebrating the second millennium; he was inviting the church to confess and ask forgiveness for the offences for the sinful past even the ones committed by the ancestors. Such purification urges Rwandans to not only heal but clean up and extirpates from memory all facts that have manipulative, ideological, religiously, politically oriented characterization. It is a work that aims at recreating the river of the history of Rwanda before, during and after 1959 and 1994. Hence the colloquium of March 2019 was given the mandate to gather shared stories of groups and communities; to engage in a pilgrimage of listening and learning from communities.

Part II: Huye 17-20 March 2019[Text in progress!]