

## **GENOCIDE, MEMORY AND ETHNIC RECONCILIATION IN RWANDA (\*)**

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### **Résumé**

Alors qu'en France, l'idée du « devoir de mémoire » est omniprésente et que le législateur combat activement le négationnisme, il est beaucoup moins clair de quoi exactement il faut se souvenir. C'est particulièrement le cas dans le contexte rwandais, où une importante batterie de textes constitutionnels et légaux interdit une interprétation des faits qui serait différente de la version officielle du génocide. En fin de compte, ces restrictions aboutissent à l'« assassinat de la mémoire hutu ».

Il n'est pas certain en effet que l'histoire officielle prônée par le régime corresponde à la vérité au sujet de questions aussi diverses que les responsabilités, le nombre et l'identité ethnique des auteurs des crimes et de leurs victimes. De nombreuses zones grises subsistent. Les mesures, notamment d'ordre pénal, prises par le régime rwandais rendent toute recherche historique sérieuse impossible, parce que punissable, et elles prennent en otage la mémoire des Hutu.

L'imposition d'une mémoire officielle, purgée des références ethniques, n'est qu'un moyen commode de masquer la triste réalité de la discrimination ethnique. En plus, elle institutionnalise un mode de contrôle de la pensée qui est profondément contraire à toute forme de dialogue interethnique menant au respect et au pardon.

The title of my presentation reflects my life-long interest in the history of the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, most notably Rwanda, the site of the biggest bloodbath of the second half of the last century. This said, part of my fascination with the theme of memory has much to do with my French background. The French are obsessed with issues of memory. « Le devoir de mémoire » – the duty to remember – is a phrase that comes up time and again in the media and scholarly writings on subjects ranging from the Algerian war to the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide and the role of the Vichy government in sending some 70,000 Jews to their graves. Oddly, however, remarkably little attention is paid to what, exactly, needs to be remembered, and whether state officials have any business in telling the French what to remember and what to forget.

### **1. THE TYRANNY OF MEMORIAL LAWS**

France's record in legislating about the past is unique. No other country as far as I am aware has passed as many laws – often referred to as « *lois mémorielles* » – regulating the country's collective memory. From the Gaysot law of July 1990, which makes the denial of the extermination of Jews a criminal offense, to that of October 2006, which promises a one-year prison term for anyone questioning the appropriateness of the term genocide to describe the mass killings of Armenians, – not to mention the law of February 2005 which enjoins teachers to « recognize in particular the positive role of the

French presence overseas, notably in north Africa »<sup>1</sup> – no other state has been as consistent in brandishing the threat of legal sanctions against deniers – with the exception of Rwanda (of which more in a moment).

For those of us who, on ethical or constitutional grounds, would question this broad sweep of legal sanctions, it is important to remind ourselves of France's depressingly rich harvest of deniers.<sup>2</sup> From Robert Faurisson to Serge Thion and Paul Rassinier, the « assassins of memory », to use Pierre Vidal-Naquet's phrase,<sup>3</sup> have engaged in a revisionist enterprise synonymous with the most outrageous form of intellectual dishonesty. Whether this sorry state of affairs is reason enough to deny the deniers the right to deny is where profound disagreements have emerged among French intellectuals. For Henri Rousso « denial (of the Holocaust) is not simply an interpretation of history: it is a major ingredient of anti-semitism since 1945 », and therefore cannot be treated on the same plane as the legislation concerning the 'proper way' to teach the history of colonization.<sup>4</sup> From that perspective the Gayssot law must be seen for what it really is – a tool to combat anti-semitism.<sup>5</sup> Pierre Nora's dissenting voice is no less convincing: « it is not the role of the legislator », he writes, « to encourage a compartmentalization of history, nor is it to arbitrate the competing claims of victims. Why not pass laws on the massacre of the Albigeois, the horrors of the wars of religion or the Terror? This is an endless process because history is paved with crimes against humanity ». <sup>6</sup> Commenting on « the aggressive tendency of certain defenders of memory », he goes on to lament the fact that « they impose a tyrannical, sometimes, terrorist, memory, vis-à-vis the scientific community... We must prevent the custodians of this or that memory to take hostage historical research ». <sup>7</sup>

Nora's words carry a powerful resonance for historians of Rwanda. The sheer extensiveness of the legal and constitutional limitations placed on the broadly defined concept of denial rules out any re-interpretation of the facts that might deviate from the official version of the genocide. Ultimately, what

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\* This paper was presented at the conference "Denying Genocide: Law, Identity and Historical Memory in the Face of Mass Atrocity", organised by the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law on 3-4 December 2006.

I am indebted to Stef Vandeginste and Constance Morrill for their much appreciated help in documenting and clarifying some of the issues dealt with in this paper.

<sup>1</sup> ROUSSO, H., "Mémoires abusives", *Le Monde*, December 24, 2005, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> See Valérie IGOUNET's pioneering work, *Histoire du négationnisme en France*, Paris, Seuil, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> VIDAL-NAQUET, P., *Les assassins de la mémoire*, Paris, La Découverte, 1987. For a more succinct statement see "Who are the Assassins of Memory?", in VIDAL-NAQUET and YAGIL, L., *Holocaust Denial in France*, Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv University, The Project for the Study of Anti-Semitism, n.d., pp. 1-15.

<sup>4</sup> For the opposite viewpoint, based on classic liberal arguments drawn from Mill and Dworkin among others, see the excellent contribution of Catriona MCKINNON, "Should we Tolerate Holocaust Denial?", *Res Publica* (2007), no. 1, pp. 9-28.

<sup>5</sup> ROUSSO, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> NORA, P., "La mémoire est de plus en plus tyrannique", *Le Figaro*, December 22, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

such restrictions imply – to paraphrase Vidal-Naquet – is the assassination of Hutu memory.

## 2. THE AMBIVALENCE OF GUILT

Before going any further, let me be clear as to ‘where I come from’.

To begin with, let there be no misunderstanding about the reality of genocide. Measured by the scale and speed of the slaughter, the intentional elimination of the targeted group, the unspeakable atrocities visited upon the victims, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the extermination of an estimated 800,000 Tutsi qualifies as genocide.

Where doubts arise is about the onus of responsibility. For all the vehement disclaimers heard in Kigali, on the strength of the evidence now available I believe that a large share of responsibility lies with the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF). To put it succinctly, there would have been no genocide without the killing machine put in place by the Habyalimana government – i.e. the incitations to murder by the media, the recruiting of *interahamwe*, the mobilization of the communal authorities behind the killers, the participation of the presidential guard and the army. This said, there would have been no genocide either without the October 1990 invasion by the RPF, the wanton murders and acts of torture committed by Kagame’s men during the civil war, and the shooting down of Habyalimana’s plane on April 6, 1994, all of which were major contributory factors to the genocide. A close reading of the book-length narrative of Lt. Abdul Ruzibiza, a defector from the Rwandan army now living in Norway, makes painfully clear the frequency and extent of the human rights abuses committed by the RPF.<sup>8</sup> The author’s meticulous reporting of the military operations leading to the crash of the presidential plane – the precipitating factor behind the killings – demonstrates beyond all reasonable doubt the responsibility of Paul Kagame in creating the conditions of a total genocide.<sup>9</sup>

Space limitations preclude a more detailed inquest into the series of events chronicled by Ruzibiza. Nonetheless, a few additional comments are in order, all of which are in contradiction with the official position of the Rwandan authorities.

For one thing, it is now becoming increasingly clear that the RPF’s determination to capture power in the capital city as quickly as possible, irrespective of the costs in terms of human lives, has meant the death of thousands of Tutsi ‘by default’ as it were.

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<sup>8</sup> RUZIBIZA, A., *Rwanda: L’histoire secrète*, Paris, Editions du Panama, 2005, Preface by Claudine Vidal.

<sup>9</sup> Which is not to say that no genocide had been planned prior to April 6, 1994; although the evidence does point to the existence of such a plan, a convincing case can be made for the view that it was aimed at the physical elimination of the leadership (national and local) of all opposition parties and not the whole of the Tutsi population. The shooting down of Habyalimana plane thus spelled the difference between a partial and a total genocide.

Furthermore, contrary to the figure of some three million perpetrators sometimes advanced by Rwandan officials, the equivalent of almost half of the Hutu population, recent research by Scott Straus shows that no more than between 7 and 8 per cent of the adult Hutu population effectively took part in the killings.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, to this day most Rwandan officials tend to assign the status of perpetrators to the majority of the Hutu population, and that of victims to the Tutsi, thus ignoring the considerable number of Hutu killed by other Hutu during the genocide. In the words of the 2006 report of the Rwandan Senate, quoting from the “Act 08/96”,<sup>11</sup>

the victim is every person killed during the period of 1/10/1990 to 31/12/1994 because he/she is Tutsi or looks like one, has family relationships with Tutsi, is a friend of a Tutsi or has close relationships with a Tutsi, has political thinking or is related to people with political thinking opposed to that of the ideology of divisive politics before 1994.

This is consistent with the argument set forth by Rony Brauman, Stephen Smith and Claudine Vidal that « the logic of ethnicity (*la logique ethniciste*) is alive and well in the official messages relentlessly repeated at the highest levels (of the government): every Hutu is suspect since his ethnic community is responsible for the genocide. Again by the same logic, only the Tutsi qualify as victims ».<sup>12</sup>

Finally, it is well to remember that the crimes committed by the RPF are not limited to Rwanda. As documented by a variety of sources, tens of thousands of Hutu civilians – a conservative estimate – were killed by units of the Rwandan army in eastern Congo in the wake of the destruction of refugee camps in October and November 1996.

All of which adds up to a number of ‘grey zones’ that cry out for systematic investigation.<sup>13</sup> In contemporary Rwanda, however, setting the

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<sup>10</sup> STRAUS, S., “How many perpetrators were there in the Rwandan genocide? An estimate”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2004), p. 94.

<sup>11</sup> *Genocide Ideology and Strategies for Its Eradication*, Kigali, 2006, p. 131. Reference to the Act 08/96 seems to be in error. Stef Vandeginste offers the following commentary: « The reference to Act 0/96 must logically be to the ‘organic law 08/96 of August 1996 on the organization of prosecutions for offences constituting the crime of genocide or crimes against humanity committed since October 1 1990’. This law, however, did not explicitly define the notion of victim... The Senate report’s definition is the same as that which has been adopted by the Minister of Local Affairs in its report of November 2002 on “Assessing the number of genocide victims, Final Report”». He further notes that the definition adopted by the Senate and the Ministry of Local Affairs is far more restrictive than the one originally intended, implicitly, in the 1996 organic law, which referred not only to the genocide against Tutsi but also to crimes against humanity and the 1949 Geneva conventions. Personal communication, November 9, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> BRAUMAN, R., SMITH, S., VIDAL, C., “Politique de terreur et privilège d’impunité au Rwanda”, *Esprit*, August-September 2000, p. 156.

<sup>13</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Primo Levi. « The pattern within which events are ordered », he writes, « is not always identifiable in a single, unequivocal fashion, and therefore different historians may understand and construe history in ways that are incompatible with one another... »

record straight is a dangerous activity, liable to bring a severe punishment to anyone foolhardy enough to challenge the constitution on issues relating to « the revisionism, denial and trivialization (*banalisation*) of the genocide ».

### 3. LEGAL SANCTIONS RELATIVE TO DIVISIONISM AND DENIAL

Whereas article 13 of the Rwandan constitution deals explicitly with « revisionism, denial and trivialization » of the genocide, all punishable by the law, article 33 condemns all forms of « divisionism ». To quote: « propagation of ethnic, regional, racial discrimination or any other form of division is punishable by law ». Discrimination and sectarianism, both implying divisionism, are criminal offenses. Exactly how the « freedom of thought and opinion » guaranteed by the same article is to be reconciled with the prohibition of discrimination, as defined by the law, remains unclear.

The penalties for violating such constitutional provisions are enshrined in the law of December 18, 2001, « instituting punishment for offenses of discrimination and sectarianism ».<sup>14</sup> Article 1 defines discrimination as « any speech, writing, or actions based on ethnicity, region or country of origin, the color of the skin, physical features, sex, language, religion or ideas aimed at depriving a person or group of persons of their rights as provided by Rwandan law and by International Conventions to which Rwanda is a party ».

Sectarianism « means the use of any speech, written statement or action that divides people, that is likely to spark conflicts among people, or that causes an uprising which might degenerate into strife among people based on discrimination mentioned in article 1. »

Article 5 states: « Any person guilty of the crime of discrimination or sectarianism... is sentenced to between three months and two years imprisonment and fined between 50,000 and 300,000 Rwandan francs or only one of these sanctions. » If, however, the offender happens to be a « government official, former official, a political party official, an official in the private sector or an official in a non-governmental organization, he/she is sentenced to between one year and five years of imprisonment and fined between 500,000 to 2,000,000 Francs or one of those two sanctions ».

Article 6 applies to « any association, political party, or non-profit making organization found guilty of offences of discrimination », in which case penalties are raised to a fine of between five and ten million Rwandan francs and a suspension of between six months and a year. However, « depending on

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the need to divide the field into 'we' and 'they' is so strong that this pattern, this bipartition – friend/enemy – prevails over all others. Popular history... is influenced by this Manichaean tendency which shuns half-tints and complexities ». LEVI, P., *The Drowned and the Saved*, New York, Vintage Books, 1988, pp. 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> The full text of law no. 47/2001 can be found in the trilingual *Official Gazette of the Republic of Rwanda*, Year 41, no. 4, February 1, 2002, pp. 12 ff. I am indebted to Constance Morrill for providing me with a copy of this document.

the seriousness of the consequences of that act of discrimination on the population, the court may double the penalty, or decide to dissolve the concerned association, political party or non-profit making organizations.

Articles 7, 8 and 9 specify the penalties applying to any person who « masterminds or helps mastermind a plan to discriminate, who uses pictures or images or any symbols over radio airwaves and television... with the aim of discriminating people, who through education sows discrimination or sectarianism ».

Article 10 stipulates the death penalty or life imprisonment for « anyone who kills, plots to kill or attempts to kill another person because of discrimination or sectarianism ».

As indicated by Article 15, the penalties are retroactive: « The crime of discrimination and that of sectarianism are not time bound ».

There is no little irony in the fact that under articles 10 and 15 a number of high-ranking Tutsi government officials, including Kagame himself, could legitimately be brought to justice and penalized in accordance with their own laws. It requires no great feat of imagination to realize that the essential purpose of this all-encompassing definition of what constitutes « divisionism » as a criminal offense is precisely the opposite, i.e. to give the Tutsi-dominated state a free hand to punish Hutu opponents. So vague and all-embracing is the language of the law as to give the courts extraordinary latitude to indict suspects on the flimsiest grounds.

Another relevant piece of legislation, which some would consider the principal legal source to combat denial, is the law of September 6, 2003, aimed at « repressing the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes ». Article 4 of this law reads: « Shall be punished of a ten to twenty-year prison term anyone who has publicly manifested, by his/her words, written statements, images or any other way, that he/she has denied the genocide, has grossly minimized it, tried to justify it or approved its motivation (*fondement*), or anyone who has concealed or destroyed the evidence thereof ». The most recent example of the application of this law is the case of the Abbé Jean-Marie Vianney, head of the Kaduha parish, sentenced to 12 years in jail on October 6, 2006, for « having downplayed the genocide ». Again, in June 2006, Faustin Twagiramungu, former Prime Minister in the post-genocide government and unsuccessful candidate to the presidency in 2004, was summoned before the Nyarugenge High Court to answer charges of « negation, denial and justification of the 1994 genocide ».<sup>15</sup>

Behind this wide-ranging repressive legislation looms Kagame's determination to ban all references to ethnic identities. Accordingly, in today's Rwanda there are no Hutu or Tutsi or Twa, only Banyarwanda. The official rationale behind this prohibition is disarmingly straightforward – and profoundly misleading: given that the genocide was the result of ethnic

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<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Stef Vandeginste for drawing my attention to these cases, and to the legislation under which they will be adjudicated.

divisions, doing away with such divisions is the best guarantee of peace. One wonders, however, whether the result might not be the precise opposite of what was intended.

One thing, at any rate, is clear: under the present circumstances any attempt to re-examine the roots of the genocide becomes extremely problematic. Not only does it run counter to the taboo on « revisionism, denial and trivialization »; doing so offers ample grounds for indictment on grounds of divisionism, discrimination or sectarianism, or all of the above.

#### 4. THE HI-JACKING OF HUTU MEMORY

« The experience of others has taught us that nations that do not deal with their past are haunted by it for generations ». <sup>16</sup> Nelson Mandela's warning finds an echo in Valérie Rosoux's observation on « the work of memory » as a central aspect of post-conflict strategies: « The question raised in the aftermath of conflict is not only 'how are we going to handle the future?', but 'how are going to handle the past?' ». She notes three possible options – one can either emphasize the memory of past conflict, conceal it, or, taking a leaf from Paul Ricoeur, engage in the work of memory (*le travail de mémoire*). <sup>17</sup>

The attitude of Rwandan officials is perhaps best described as a combination of the first two, but with the first looming decidedly larger: there is, on the one hand, a conscious effort (unconvincing though it is) to obliterate the past by erasing ethnic identities, while at the same time leaving no doubt that the roles of perpetrators and victims are assigned respectively to Hutu and Tutsi, and are by no means interchangeable. In addition to what was said earlier about the ethnic definition of 'victim', consider the point made by Claudine Vidal in her discussion of the annual commemorations of the genocide: « The commemorations », she writes, « explicitly deny the status of victims to those Hutu who, even though they did not kill, were massacred so as to create a climate of terror. How can one speak of reconciliation when the exposure of skeletons has as its only purpose to remind the Tutsi that their own people were killed by Hutu? This is tantamount to keeping the latter in a permanent position of culpability ». <sup>18</sup>

At another level, concealing one's feelings about past conflict is sometimes seen as a rational choice option. Such is the price Rwandans have to pay in order to live in peace with each other. This is the crux of the argument set forth by Susanne Buckley-Zistel in her article titled "Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide

<sup>16</sup> MANDELA, N., "After Such Crimes, What Forgiveness?", *Civilization*, June/July 1999, p. 78.

<sup>17</sup> ROSOUX, V., "Mémoire et résolution des conflits", *Agenda Inter-Culturel*, no. 222, April 2004, p. 4. See also in the same issue the thoughtful reflection of Maurice NIWESE, "Dix ans après le génocide rwandais : quel travail de mémoire ?", pp. 8-10.

<sup>18</sup> VIDAL, C., "Les commémorations du génocide au Rwanda", *Les Temps Modernes*, 2001, p. 613.

Rwanda".<sup>19</sup> Since « the memory of the genocide... is not a unifying factor, as disagreement prevails over the clear demarcation of victim and perpetrator », the reluctance of her respondents to remember their tragic past can best be seen as a « chosen amnesia »: the cumulative pressures of government coercion, fear of the other, pragmatism combine to make amnesia the preferred option. « Pretending peace », she concludes, « is a common, and widely accepted, practice in Rwanda ». <sup>20</sup> Missing from the argument, however, is a critical discussion of whether amnesia in this case is « chosen » or imposed, or, in Ricoeur's terms, whether behind this chosen amnesia does not lie something more fundamental, i.e. a « thwarted memory »<sup>21</sup>: one is indeed impelled to wonder whether the phrase « chosen amnesia » is appropriate to describe a context in which the Hutu masses have no other choice if they want to survive but to keep their thoughts and frustrations to themselves. As Peter Novick reminds us, « people often think of 'choice' as implying *free* choice, but the sort of choices we're speaking of are shaped and constrained by circumstances ». <sup>22</sup>

The issue, at bottom, is whether the exclusion of Hutu memory for the sake of a spuriously unifying official memory can bring the people of Rwanda any closer to national reconciliation, or, at the very least, peaceful cohabitation.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. THE WORK OF MEMORY

What, then, of the « work of memory »?

The exercise – which consists in giving proper recognition to the plurality of perceptions of the past – is complicated by the very nature of collective memory. As many have noted since Halbwachs first coined the expression,<sup>24</sup> collective memory is not synonymous with historical memory. Nor is it free of ambiguities, biases and all sorts of subjective representations of 'what happened'. That it operates selectively is not the least of the difficulties we're confronted with. In the context of this discussion, for example, it is hardly surprising if the Kibeho killings of April 1995, like the horrors perpetrated by the Rwandan army against Hutu civilians in eastern Congo should be systematically erased from the Tutsi collective memory, in much the

<sup>19</sup> In *Africa*, 76 (2), 2006, pp. 131-150.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>21</sup> RICOEUR, P., *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> NOVICK, P., *The Holocaust in American Life*, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> I have dealt with this issue at greater length in "The Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda", in CLARK, Ph., KAUFMAN, Z. (eds.), *After Genocide: Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, forthcoming. See also LEMARCHAND, R., NIWESE, M., "Mass Murder, The Politics of Memory and Post-Genocide Reconstruction: The Cases of Rwanda and Burundi", in POULIGNY, B., CHESTERMAN, S., SCHNABEL, A. (eds.), *After Mass Crime: Rebuilding States and Communities*, New York, United Nations Publications, 2007, forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> HALBWACHS, M., *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1997.



same way as the worse atrocities perpetrated against hapless Tutsi civilians by the genocidaires are sometimes systematically denied by Hutu exiles. In Milan Kundera's phrase, in both instances historical memories have been « airbrushed out of history ».

Furthermore, as Halbwachs explicitly recognized, « there are several collective memories (which) may succeed each other or exist at the same moment ». <sup>25</sup> This is true of Hutu as it is of Tutsi. Nothing is more misleading than to view ethnic memories through a binary prism. Among Hutu there are those who killed out of hatred and those who killed in order not to be killed, and there are those who risked their lives in order to save their Tutsi neighbors, and those who, though innocent, were driven into exile and managed to escape the avenging arm of the FPR. Each group's memory is distinct. This is also true of the Tutsi. To lump together under the same ethnic label communities whose lived experiences – « *le passé vécu* », in Halbwachs' phrase – are as radically different as the survivors of the slaughter, the 'refugee warriors' from Uganda and the returnees from Burundi, the Congo, Europe and the US, on the mistaken assumption that they all share the same collective memory, makes no sense. And yet, it is not unreasonable to suggest that with the passage of time, as group identities become even more polarized under the impact of those very policies so loudly condemned by the Rwandan government – discrimination and de facto divisionism – these disparate *passés vécus* could well coalesce into separate ethnic memories.

The work of memory seeks to transcend the reiteration of denunciatory histories. <sup>26</sup> The phrase, Paul Ricoeur writes, harks back to Freud's concept of *Durcharbeiten* (which he translates as « *translaboration* »), which he used to refer to the obstacles to the psychoanalytic cure raised by the obsessive, repetitive memory of traumatizing events. <sup>27</sup> In Ricoeur's discourse it brings into focus the need for a « critical use of memory ». Rather than a one-sided compulsive urge to rehash the sufferings endured by one group at the hands of the other, or allowing them to slip into oblivion, working through memory is first and foremost an exercise in narrative history. It aims at « narrating differently the stories of the past, telling them from the point of view of the other – the other, my friend or my enemy ». As alternative perceptions are brought into view, past events take on a different meaning: « Past events cannot be erased: one cannot undo what has been done, nor prevent what happened. On the other hand, the meaning of what happened whether inflicted by us onto others, or by them upon us, is not fixed once and for all... Thus what is changed about the past is its moral freight (*sa charge morale*), the weight of the debt it carries... This is how the working of memory opens the way to forgiveness to the extent that it settles a debt by changing the very meaning of the past ».

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> The discussion in this paragraph and the next lean heavily on my article on "The Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda", op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> RICOEUR, P., "Le pardon peut-il guérir ?", *Esprit*, March-April 1995, p. 78.

Readers of Eva Hoffman will readily notice the convergence of her thinking with Ricoeur's. In her wonderfully sensitive essay on "The Balm of Recognition", she laments the fact that through the lens of the current rhetoric « memory always stands for victimological memory, embraced by particular groups, foregrounding the darkest episodes of various pasts ». <sup>28</sup> What « troubles me », she adds, is that « the injunctions to remember, if reiterated too often, can become formulaic – an injunction precisely not to think or grapple with the past. Moreover, the uses of collective memory to bolster a group's identity, or a fixed identification with parental victimhood, seem sometimes to verge on a kind of appropriation of bad faith... What we see is the marshalling of victimological, defensive memory for the purpose of aggression ». Instead she invites us « to look beyond the fixed moment of trauma to those longer historical patterns, to supplement partisan memory with a more complex and encompassing view of history – a view that might examine the common history of the antagonistic groups and that might, among other things, enable us to question and criticize dubious and propagandistic uses of collective memory ». <sup>29</sup>

It is difficult to think of a more lucid diagnosis of the self-inflicted handicaps facing the government of Rwanda as it tries to conjure up the past through ethnic amnesia. Recognition in the sense in which Hoffman uses the term means more than one-sided remembrance of 'what happened'; it means coming to terms with the atrocities inflicted by each group upon the other; it means « to name wrongs as wrongs and to bring some of those responsible to account » irrespective of ethnic identities; it means a critical re-examination of the « moral freight » of the genocide.

The work of memory is always an excruciatingly difficult and painful enterprise under any circumstances. In Rwanda, when one considers the restrictions placed on « revisionism, denial and trivialization », the prospects for any such effort towards reconciliation are out of the question. The imposition of an official memory, purged of ethnic references, is not just a convenient ploy to mask the brutal realities of ethnic discrimination. It institutionalizes a mode of thought control profoundly antithetical to any kind of inter-ethnic dialogue aimed at recognition and forgiveness. This is hardly the way to bring Hutu and Tutsi closer together in a common understanding of their tragic past.

Gainesville, December 2006

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<sup>28</sup> HOFFMAN, E., "The Balm of Recognition", in OWEN, N. (ed.), *Human Rights, Human Wrongs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 302.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.