

The Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda

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“Never again! Plus jamais!” The message – so often heard, so seldom heeded – was delivered clear and loud to those present in the *Amahoro* stadium in Kigali on 7 April 2004, on the tenth anniversary of one of the most monstrous bloodbaths of the last century. Relayed through public speeches, survivors’ reminiscences, multiple banderoles, even the name of the venue – “Peace” – gave symbolic significance to that defining moment.

This was a time to remember the enormity of the crimes committed a decade ago, while the international community looked the other way. This was a time for all Rwandans to commune in remembrance of their common agony; a time for recognition.

Unlike on a similar occasion in 1995, when a posthumous homage was paid to Hutu and Tutsi victims, this time, as in previous years, Kagame’s discourse, in turn mournful and accusatory, made no mention of ethnic identities. To do so would have been indecently superfluous, and in any case contrary to the public ban on all references to ethnicity. There are no Hutu or Tutsi in today’s Rwanda, only Banyarwanda (Rwandans).

In justification of this drastic reconfiguration of collective identities Rwandan officials are prompt to point out that the aim of the state at this critical juncture is to build a nation, and the first step towards this daunting task is to do away with ethnic labels once and for all. The logic of the argument is straightforward: “if awareness of ethnic differences can be learned, so too can the idea that ethnicity does not exist”.¹ The rationale is equally clear: “divisionism” – ethnic, regional and political -- has been the bane of Rwanda, and indeed the root cause of the genocide; the time has come to lay the foundation for a national community free of the stigma of ethnicity. This is why the crime of “divisionism” has been added to the penal code: besides providing the government with a convenient weapon to ban almost any type of organised opposition, it offers the new nation-builders a unique opportunity to legislate ethnic identities out of existence.

Although there are obvious and compelling reasons to remember the atrocities of 1994, the question is whether the exclusion of ethnic memories for the sake of a spuriously unifying official memory can bring the people of Rwanda, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, any closer to building the mutual trust necessary for a peaceful co-existence. Reconciliation, assuming it can ever be achieved, requires that the past be confronted, not obliterated. Recognition that guilt and victimization transcend ethnic boundaries is not enough. No less crucial is how ethnic and individual memories alter perceptions of the past, and by implication the writing of history. What follows is an attempt to explore the politics of

¹ Mark Lacey, “Rwanda: There is no ethnicity there”, *International Herald Tribune*, 10 April, 2004, p.2.

memory in post-genocide Rwanda in the light of the categories proposed by Paul Ricoeur, thwarted memory, manipulated memory and enforced memory.²

The Ambivalence of Ethnic Memory

Memory – official or ethnic, collective or individual – is a pre-eminently subjective phenomenon. It blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, between factual truth and interpretive truth. Blind spots, ethnic amnesia, denials of historical evidence operate to mask unpalatable truths and magnify others out of proportion. “Memory”, writes Stanley Cohen, “is a social product, reflecting the agenda and social location of those who invoke it”.³ This is true not only of the official memory invoked by the Kagame government, but of the ethnic and individual memories summoned by perpetrators and victims alike. In these conditions the distinction between good faith and bad faith is not always easy to pin down. The reason for this is nowhere more convincingly articulated than by Primo Levi in his penetrating commentary on “the memory of the offense”:⁴

There are those who lie consciously, coldly falsifying reality itself, but more numerous are those who weigh anchor, move off, momentarily or forever, from genuine memories, and fabricate for themselves a convenient reality. The past is a burden to them; they feel repugnance for things done or suffered and tend to replace them with others. The substitution may begin in full awareness, with an invented scenario, mendacious, restored, but less painful than the real one; they repeat the description to others but also to themselves, and the distinction between true and false progressively loses its contours, and man ends by fully believing the story he has told so many times and continues to tell, polishing and retouching here and there the details which are least credible or incongruous or incompatible with the acquired picture of historically accepted events: initial bad faith has become good faith.

Anyone familiar with the discourse of the more radically inclined members of the Hutu and Tutsi communities on the roots of the genocide cannot fail to note the pertinence of Levi’s comments: the “memory of the offense”, whether falsified or fabricated, is always selective, and thus acts as a key mechanism in the construction of a “convenient reality”.

The clash of ethnic memories is an essential component of the process by which the legacy of genocide – the “memory of the offense” – is being perceived or fabricated by one community or the other: once filtered through the prism of ethnicity entirely different constructions are imposed on the same ghastly reality – from which emerge strikingly divergent interpretations of why a genocide happened.

Not only is the past seen through a different ethnic lens but there are also major differences *among* Hutu and Tutsi in the way in which it is remembered or forgotten.

² Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2002)

³ Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 241.

⁴ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989, translated by Raymond Rosenthal), p. 27.

There are those fortunate ones, overwhelmingly Tutsi, who survived the carnage and witnessed at close range the horrors of genocide, who saw friends and neighbors and members of their own families shot, speared, clubbed to death or hacked to pieces by mobs of enraged Hutu youth. And there are the *inkontanyi*, Kagame's refugee warriors" who killed tens of thousands of Hutu civilians in "liberated" zones, and, according to credible testimonies from Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) defectors, did not shrink from inflicting horrendous tortures on their suspected enemies.⁵

There are the blood-soaked Hutu génocidaires, and there are the "heroes" who risked or lost their lives in order to save their Tutsi neighbors. And there are those countless, anonymous Hutu who were witness to the cold-blooded killings perpetrated by Kagame's troops in Rwanda and eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]).⁶ All, to some extent, experience the same dysfunctions of memory and emotional traumas so tellingly explored by Liisa Malkki among survivors of the 1972 genocide of Hutu in Burundi.⁷

Finally, there are the ideologues who manipulate the historical record for political purposes. They are found on both sides of the ethnic divide, and beyond. Even in the absence of ulterior political motives, the deliberate travesty of the facts is not uncommon among foreign observers. A case in point is Helmut Strizek who, in a conference at the Sorbonne, on 6 April 2004, denied that the killings were planned, thereby implicitly denying the existence of a genocide. Christian Davenport, Professor of Political Science at the University of Maryland, also contests the appropriateness of the term "genocide", arguing that what occurred was a "totalitarian purge, a politicide rather than ethnic cleansing or genocide". Moreover, the majority of the victims, according to Davenport, were Hutu, not Tutsi: "Our research strongly suggests that a majority of the victims were Hutu – there weren't enough Tutsi in Rwanda at the time to account for all reported deaths... Either the scale of the killing was much less than is widely believed, or, more likely, a huge number of Hutu were caught up in the violence as inadvertent victims. The evidence suggests the killers didn't try to figure out who everybody was. They erred on the side of comprehensiveness"⁸. Such assertions are enthusiastically received by some Hutu deniers, all too eager to bolster their claims by quoting from European "authorities". One example among others of Hutu *négationisme* can be found in the statement released on March 21 by the *Association des Rescapés du Génocide des Réfugiés Rwandais en République Démocratique du Congo*, which states: "Since there is no proof that the genocide was planned... how can one say that a genocide has been directed against the Tutsi of Rwanda in 1994?" Recent leaks to the press of the report by

⁵ See in particular Abdul Ruzibiza's devastating testimony, *Témoignage destiné à démontrer les erreurs commises par le gouvernement rwandais et le FPR qui ont permis la possibilité d'un génocide* (Brennasen, [Norway], 2004), pp. 18-19.

⁶ See Refugees International, *The Lost Refugees: Herded and Hunted in Eastern Zaire* (Washington, September 1997).

⁷ Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmogony and Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁸ As reported by Matthew Green of Reuters, 3 April, 2004; see www.genodynamics.com.

the French investigating magistrate, Jean-Louis Bruguière⁹ -- in which strong circumstantial evidence points to the implication of Kagame in the shooting down of Habyarimana's plane, on 6 April, 1994 – have given a new slant to the argument advanced by Hutu deniers: the mass murder of Tutsi was the direct outcome of the dastardly plot concocted by the RPF, and thus has nothing to do with the planning imputed to extremist Hutu elements. If one can speak of a genocide, the argument goes, the responsibility lies squarely with Kagame. A closer look at the evidence reveals a more complex reality. Nonetheless, critical questions remain about the role of Kagame in paving the ground for the carnage, including those raised by Bruguière in his as yet unpublished report.

Thwarted Memory

There are many ways in which memory departs from reality. In his magisterial work on *Memory, History and Oblivion*, Paul Ricoeur refers to “thwarted memory, manipulated memory and enforced memory” (“*mémoire empêchée, mémoire manipulée, mémoire abusivement commandée*”).¹⁰ Our fixation on “*le devoir de mémoire*”, the “duty to remember”, he argues, makes us lose sight of a more urgent task, which he calls “*le travail de mémoire*”, the “labor of memory”, which involves a more sustained effort to probe the relationship between history and memory, and between memory and recognition. This is also Eva Hoffman's point when she writes, “the injunctions to remember, if reiterated too often, can become formulaic – an injunction precisely not to think or grapple with the past”.¹¹ Thinking or grappling with the past is what is conspicuously missing from Rwanda's official memory, in other words a sustained effort to recognize the profound ambivalence of the notion of guilt. What persists to this day, in Cohen's words, is “collective memory pressed into shape by being repressed”.¹²

Ricoeur's notion of thwarted memory gives a clue to an understanding of the many blind spots in Rwanda's official memory. What is being thwarted through the ban on ethnic identities is the memory of atrocities endured by Hutu and Tutsi, where ethnicity, though singularly unhelpful for discriminating between victims and perpetrators, is crucially important for addressing the roots of the injuries suffered by each community. What is being thwarted is the memory of those generally referred to as “Hutu moderates”, a “ubiquitous, undefined phrase”, as Nigel Eltringham correctly shows, which “fails to communicate the pro-active resistance these actors demonstrated”.¹³ Among them were Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, three government ministers, the president of the Constitutional Court, the entire leadership of the *Parti Social Démocrate* (PSD), 49

⁹ See Stephen Smith, “Révélations sur l'attentat qui a déclenché le génocide rwandais”, *Le Monde*, 10 March 2004, p. 1-3. For an English-language summary version, see Stephen Smith, “Rwandan president implicated in death of predecessor by French magistrate”, *Guardian Weekly*, 25-31 March, 2004, p. 31.

¹⁰ Ricoeur, op. cit., 236 ff.

¹¹ Eva Hoffman, “The Balm of Recognition”, in Nicholas Owen ed., *Human Rights, Human Wrongs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 296.

¹² Cohen, op. cit., p. 138.

¹³ Nigel Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 97.

journalists killed because they aired criticisms of the genocidal crusade, scores of human rights activists, along with tens of thousands of Hutu killed by other Hutu for no other reasons than they happened to belong to an opposition party, or because they happened to look like Tutsi, or because their spouses were Tutsi. What is being thwarted is the memory of those Hutu who steadfastly refused to surrender their Tutsi friends and neighbours to the militias, who gave them shelter and protection at considerable risk to themselves and their families. Exemplary is the story of Damas Mutezintare, a Hutu who saved nearly 400 Tutsi lives, 300 children and 80 adults, in his orphanage at Nyamirambo. “I haven’t done anything special”, he told the correspondent of *La Libre Belgique*, Marie-France Cros. “I just said to myself I’ve got to do something, but I wasn’t sure what the results would be... I’ve been lucky”¹⁴. Not all such “heroes” were lucky enough to live to tell their story.

Summoning a de-ethnicised victim-centered memory is not enough; what has yet to be given proper recognition is that Hutu and Tutsi were victims of a calamity for which responsibility is shared by elements of both communities. This sharing of responsibility is what Rwanda’s official ideologues refuse to acknowledge. Instead every effort is made to manipulate memory so as to exonerate the ruling elites of all responsibility in the circumstances that led to the abyss. Complex though they are, a key element in the chain of events leading to the butchery is the outbreak of the bitter civil war instigated by the RPF.

Manipulated Memory

“Tous les autres sont coupables, sauf moi” (“All others are guilty except me”) : Céline’s phrase¹⁵ provides a subtext to Kagame’s commemorative discourse on 7 April 2004. There are excellent reasons for lambasting the ignominious attitude of the French government throughout the crisis, as Kagame did on that occasion, the culpable indifference of the international community, the disastrous consequences of Belgian colonial policies. Predictably, however, nothing was said of the responsibility borne by Kagame himself in unleashing the civil war that led to the genocide. This is not to deny the very obvious culpability of the Hutu génocidaires and their leaders in planning, organising and carrying out the murder of approximately 800,000 people, only to underscore that the climate of fear and paranoia created by the civil war did at least as much as Radio des Mille Collines to heighten the receptivity of Hutu extremists to a “final solution”. Again, it is not insignificant that among the one million Hutu internally displaced persons (IDPs) forced out of their homelands by incoming RPF troops¹⁶ – most of them living in utterly inhumane conditions in makeshift refugee camps – many enthusiastically joined the killing spree. The key point here is that there would have been no genocide had Kagame not decided to unleash his refugee warriors on 1 October 1990,

¹⁴ Marie-France Cros, “Portrait d’un juste”, *La Libre Belgique*, April 5, 2004, p. 12.

¹⁵ Quoted by Pascal Bruckner, *La Tentation de l’Innocence* (Paris 2001)

¹⁶ For a graphic description of the devastating attacks mounted by RPF troops on IDP camps, see “Rwanda: SOS pour une guerre oubliée”, *La Croix*, February 25, 1992, p. 3, which quotes extensively from the report written by a group of missionaries (“Les pretres du doyenné du Mutara crient la détresse des victimes de la guerre”, Feb. 10, 1992)

in violation of the most elementary principle of international law. If he deserves full credit for stopping the killings, an equally convincing case can be made for the view that he bears much of the onus of responsibility for provoking them.

Tempting as it is to see in the government of President Kagame the embodiment of moral virtue for bringing the genocide to an end, the mourning of Tutsi lives must not be allowed to obscure the crimes against humanity committed by Kagame's army. If, as claimed by the UN-commissioned Gersony Report between 25,000 and 45,000 Hutu were massacred by the RPA in only three communes of Rwanda between the months of April and August 1994¹⁷, how many were similarly killed in the whole of Rwanda during the same period?

Again, the systematic extermination by Rwandan troops in eastern DRC of tens of thousands of Hutu refugees – conveniently lumped together as “génocidaires” – has been virtually “airbrushed out of history”, to use Milan Kundera's phrase. Stephen Smith, in his absorbing sketches of Congolese history¹⁸ estimates at 200,000 the number of Hutu killed in the course of search-and-destroy operations conducted by the (RPA) in 1996 and 1997, of whom “800 were machine-gunned in broad daylight in the port city of Mbandaka on May 16, 1997, the day Laurent-Desire Kabila captured the capital”. Are we to assume that these victims of Kagame's “security imperative” are to be left out of the macabre accounting of 1994?

Admittedly, whether the killings in eastern DRC can be seen as genocide is open to debate. The terms “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity”, rather than genocide, are generally used to describe the systematic elimination of refugees populations after the destruction of their camps in 1996. Nonetheless, the June 1998 UN report on violations of human rights in the DRC does not shrink from evoking the “G-word”, but adds a cautionary note: “The killings perpetrated by the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques* (AFDL) constitute crimes against humanity, just as the denial of humanitarian assistance to Hutu refugees. The members of the team feel that certain types of murder could constitute acts of genocide, depending on the intention of the perpetrators, and request that such crimes and their motives become the object of further investigation”.¹⁹ Arguably, even in the absence of wholesale massacres comparable to those perpetrated against Tutsi in 1994, the thoroughly inhumane treatment visited upon Hutu refugees would fit Helen Fein's definition of “genocide by attrition”, which occurs “after a group is singled out for political and civil discrimination. It is separated from the larger society, and its right to life is threatened through concentration and forced displacement, together with systematic deprivation of food, water, and sanitary and medical facilities”.²⁰

¹⁷ See Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story* (Washington: Human Rights Watch and Federation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme, 1999), pp. 726-729.

¹⁸ Stephen Smith, *Le Fleuve Congo* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2003), p. 95.

¹⁹ *UN Report of the investigative team charged with investigating serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the DRC*, quoted in *Dialogue* (Brussels), no. 206, September-October, 1998, p. 79.

²⁰ Helen Fein, “Genocide by Attrition in the Sudan and Elsewhere”, *The Institute for the Study of Genocide Newsletter*, no. 29, Fall 2002, p. 7.

Enforced Memory

If there is ample evidence that the regime is manipulating the historical record for the sake of an official memory, in what sense can one speak of an enforced memory?

At the outset, in a legal sense, the decree on ethnicity rules out public expressions of ethnic memory. Intimations that Tutsi have killed Hutu or that Hutu have killed Tutsi are subject to the same legal sanctions, regardless of the commonly accepted truth that Tutsi is synonymous with victim and Hutu with perpetrator. The writing of history, like the summoning of memories, thus takes on the quality of a fairy tale, where ethnic identifications rarely come to the surface.

No less important examples of enforced memory are the rituals of the annual genocide commemoration, which again unfold as a tribute to victims whose ethnic identity hardly needs to be mentioned. As Claudine Vidal points out, “at every commemoration those in power have instrumentalised the representation of the genocide in the context of the political conflict at the time”. Vidal continues, “The commemorations 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.”²¹ This is a telling commentary on how the selectivity of public memory helps nurture ethnic enmities. As Vidal explicitly suggests, in essence the official history inscribed in the commemoration ceremonies was meant to give ideological legitimacy to the consolidation of Tutsi power. The elimination of public references to ethnic identity conveniently erases from the record the memory of Hutu victims or those “righteous” Hutu who died protecting Tutsi friends and neighbours. The only category left are the *génocidaires*.

The instrumentalisation of genocide – of which the commemoration rituals are but one example – has been the subject of scathing criticisms by three well-known experts, Vidal, Rony Brauman, and Stephen Smith. They convincingly argue that public sympathy for the victims of the genocide, and, more importantly, for the successor government that stopped the genocide, has been instrumentalised in ways that allow the Kagame government to commit further crimes with impunity. “The global criminalisation of the Hutu community”, they write, “poses a major threat to civil peace... Every Hutu is suspect since his community bears the onus of guilt for the genocide... The official history of genocide makes no reference to Hutu victims or Hutu survivors, or those Hutu who saved Tutsi lives at their own peril.”²² What Filip Reyntjens calls “the genocide credit”²³ enjoyed by Kagame has helped deflect attention from the crimes committed by the RPF, and instead win the current Rwandan government the sympathies of an

²¹ Claudine Vidal, “Les commémorations du génocide au Rwanda”, *Les Temps Modernes*, 2001, p.613.

²² Rony Brauman, Stephen Smith, Claudine Vidal, “Rwanda: Politique de terreur, privilège d’impunité”, *Esprit*, August-September 2000, p. 155.

²³ Filip Reyntjens, “Rwanda, Ten Years On: From Genocide to Dictatorship”, *African Affairs*, 2004, p. 199.

international community all too eager to atone for its shameful behaviour during the genocide. To a considerable extent, the skill with which the Rwandan authorities have capitalised on this genocide credit, goes far in explaining the reluctance of most outside observers to criticise Kagame's human rights record, including his suppression of ethnic identities by decree (as if one could change society by decree!). Enforced ethnic amnesia is the most formidable obstacle to reconciliation, because it rules out the process of reckoning by which each community must confront its past and come to terms with its share of responsibility for the horrors of 1994.

The Work of Memory: Recognition and Reconciliation

What, then, is the relationship between the politics of memory and the prospects for national reconciliation in Rwanda? The short answer is that this relationship is highly problematic. To speak of national reconciliation as a realistic short-term goal is to make exceedingly short shrift of the gaping wounds each community has inflicted on the other. They will take generations to heal. The scars will remain forever etched into the collective consciousness of Hutu and Tutsi. But if forgiveness is not to be expected any time soon, can one find a redemptive element in what Eva Hoffman calls "recognition", i.e. a "reckoning with the past", where "recognition of what actually happened – of the victims' experience and the perpetrators' responsibility, and ultimately the broader structures of cause and effect – can allow some healing to take place"?²⁴

What makes the "duty to remember" so problematic as a path to reconciliation is that the phrase leaves out the crucial questions: What is to be remembered? How? By whom? And for what purpose?

No one was more dutifully conscious of the obligation to remember than President Kagame on 7 April 2004, but what was being remembered, in effect, was the collective agony of the Tutsi, not also the sufferings and losses of the Hutu. The exclusion of Hutu victims from Rwanda's official memory can only strengthen the conviction of the majority of the population that the genocide has been shamefully instrumentalised for the benefit of the regime. "Memory is blind to all but the group it binds", writes Pierre Nora, "which is to say... that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific, collective, plural and yet individual".²⁵ There is Kagame's official memory, "blind to all but the group it binds", and there is a Hutu memory. There is a Tutsi memory (which is not necessarily synonymous with official memory) and there a plurality of memories among Hutu and Tutsi. Each must find its place in the annual mourning ceremonies of 7 April; oblivion is not an option if the promise of "never again!" is to be fulfilled.

What could be seen as the obvious alternative – giving free rein to ethnic memories – is no less problematic. These can be just as selective in their choice of victims, just as biased in their apportioning of blame, just as blind to the larger historical picture as

²⁴ Hoffman, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

²⁵ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989), p. 8.

official memories. This is made cruelly clear in some of the statements and *prises de position* issued by the more militant Hutu refugee organisations in exile.

A more fruitful approach is the one explored by Hoffman in her wonderfully sensitive essay on “The Balm of Recognition”. Commenting on “the current rhetoric”, she writes, “memory always stands for victimological memory, embraced by particular groups, and foregrounding the darkest episodes of various pasts... And yet there is something that troubles me about the current discourse of memory. For one thing, 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 groups’ identity, or a fixed identification with parental victimhood, seem sometimes to verge on a kind of appropriation or bad faith... What we see is the marshalling of victimological, defensive memory for the purposes of aggression”.²⁶ 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”.²⁷

Recognition in this sense means more than mere remembrance; it means coming to terms with the unspeakable atrocities inflicted on Hutu and Tutsi, by Hutu and Tutsi; it means “to name wrongs as wrongs and to bring some of those responsible to account”²⁸ irrespective of ethnic identities; it means addressing the traumas experienced by the tens of thousands of survivors (and indeed many of the perpetrators); it means placing the horrors of genocide in the perspective of the broader historical forces that have led to violence. All of this and more are included in what Ricoeur has in mind when he urges upon us the exigencies of a “travail de mémoire”.

The phrase, Ricoeur tells us,²⁹ harks back to Freud’s concept of *Durcharbeiten* (which he translates as “*translaboration*”), which he used to call attention to the obstacles to the psychoanalytic cure raised by the obsessive, repetitive memory of traumatising moments. 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 has happened. On the other hand, the meaning of what happened, whether inflicted by us unto 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

²⁶ Hoffman, op. cit. pp. 296-7.

²⁷ Ibid. p.302.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 281.

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “Le pardon peut-il guérir?” *Esprit*, March-April 1995, p. 78.

the extent that it settles a debt by changing the very meaning of the past”.³⁰ Both Ricoeur and Hoffman are sceptical of injunctions to remember; both reject the notion of oblivion as a vector of forgiveness; and both are aware of the need to give a central place to the claims of a “critical memory”, immune to appropriation and manipulation.

Under any circumstances the search for a critical memory in post-genocide Rwanda would be difficult enough given the radically different narratives through which the past is interpreted. With the ban on ethnicity decreed by Kagame the prospects are even bleaker. Enforced memory in today’s Rwanda does more than suppress ethnic identities, it rules out “recognition” and makes the search for a “critical memory” an exercise likely to be denounced as a source of “divisionism” and therefore liable to legal sanctions. Ironically, while aimed at eliminating the “divisions of the past”, the decree on ethnicity makes them all the more pregnant with mutual enmities. 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 institutionalises a mode of thought control profoundly antithetical to any kind of inter-ethnic dialogue aimed at a rethinking of the atrocities of mass murder. This is hardly the way to bring Hutu and Tutsi closer together in a common understanding of their tragic past.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 80.