

Memory Crisis: What Rwandans Remember and Forget

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Since the early 1990s, Rwanda imposed itself on the scholarly and media arenas and certainly tops the list of African countries with the most prolific literature. However, none of these books and articles published so far has deeply addressed the collective memory issue and the part it played in the different tragedies in Rwanda. This lack of interest in the memories of Rwanda could be attributed to the fact that memory studies are still at their infancy stage even in the West, where scholars still have to agree on their methodologies and on the boundaries between their discipline and historiography, to name a few. In this essay, I will argue that Rwanda's ethnic memories have been the most important cause behind all inter-ethnic confrontations throughout Rwanda's history. I want to closely consider the uses of the interpretations of the past in Rwanda, focusing on how they give validity to class, social and political structure [1]. Like Plumb (2004: 17) argues, it is my conviction that the most important problems facing Rwanda are not new since they have similarities and analogies in the past. I will first discuss parallel remembering, a phenomenon that is common in modern Rwanda. Then I will address the crucial issue of dual interpretations of the past, that is, witnessing the same event and yet interpreting it differently depending on one's ethnic memory. Thirdly, I will briefly explore the ethnic memories, their reminders, and their role in fuelling ethnic crises. Finally, I will look at names and the ethnic memories they naturally vehicle.

Parallel Remembrances

On Christmas 2006 I met a young Rwandan lady, 25, who survived the 23 April 1994 massacre perceived by her as a counter-genocide by the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF)'s rebels in Byumba soccer stadium. Being myself from Byumba where I spent much of my early childhood, I was highly inquisitive about how the people of my place of origin were butchered. I asked her the details of what happened that day. She painfully told the story, admitting that it was the first time in twelve years she was accepting to talk about that heart-breaking event, simply because she was sure that her story would not land into untrustworthy ears. I was lucky to ask my questions after reading the first ever written book about the so-called counter-genocide by former RPF lieutenant Abdul Ruzibiza [2]. I was struck by the coincidence of the two stories, one from the victim side and the other from the killer side. Unfortunately, the lady, whom I will not name since she still lives in Byumba, could not go beyond the scene of a 'huge black smoke rising from the stadium' taking the souls of the poor peasants to the skies. Whether 2,500 people were butchered and burned or not and by whom and why, is not my major concern here. My concern is to know how this painful event is [not] remembered, and by whom. The undeniable reality is that the 23 April 1994 massacre took place in that particular place, but unlike other similar events, it has not retained the attention of Rwandan authorities, nor has it prompted them to raise a monument in remembrance of

those people, who, until now, have not been mourned nor received any appropriate burial, let alone an official day of remembrance.

After minutes of weeping, my interlocutor evacuated much of her pain and asked if I wanted to know more. The ‘torture’ thus resumed. I wanted to know how these people had been counted during the 2003 official census of the genocide victims in the city of Byumba, where almost no anti-Tutsi genocide took place. She told me that ‘all the dead in 1994 were genocide victims’. She went on to say that ‘the only details we were asked by the census agents were whether our relatives had been killed by machete, grenade, gun, etc; or whether the killer was a militiaman, a government soldier or a civilian (neighbour)’. There was thus no room for RPF rebels as killers on the census form. ‘Why should I put myself in problems by evoking the [23 April 1994] massacre?’, asked the lady, concluding our talk.

The most interesting point here is that political authorities are forcing part of the population to forget, or, let’s say, to remember events differently from the way they took place. Bernard Lewis reminds that remembering is not a fortuitous act but rather a means to an end. One of the purposes of remembering, he adds, is ‘to explain and perhaps to justify the present- a present, some present – on which there may be dispute’ (Lewis 1975: 55-6). Considered from this angle, remembering serves political, ideological goals and is unmistakably subjective. In the case of the lady from Byumba, she has two parallel remembrances of the 23 April 1994 killing: the official one, that is the one she learned from the government that was formed by the victorious rebels, and the true, prohibited, and more intimate one, which she shares with other witnesses of the massacre far from public ears. The official version as summarised by President Paul Kagame, RPF commander in chief during the 1990-1994 war is:

...ngo na RPF nayo ngo yarishe yishe abantu? Yishe abahe se? Miliyoni zikarinda zambuka zimaze kwica? RPF yishe abahe? RPF igira neza gusa. Cyangwa yararangaye sinzi. Ariko ngirango ni uko ubushobozi bwari buhari butari buhagije. Ngirango ntitwajyaga gukora buri kintu cyose uko gishoboka. Niyo mpamvu nsubira inyuma nkicuza. (Kagame’s speech, 7 April 2007 in Murambi, Southern Province)

...they keep saying that the RPF too killed people? Whom did they kill? Millions of people crossed the border after massacring? Who was killed by the RPF? The RPF do laudable things only. Maybe were we somewhat careless. But I think the means at our disposal were not enough. That is why we could not achieve everything the way we should. That is also why I am regretting. (Kagame’s speech, 7 April 2007 in Murambi, Southern Province. Trans: Olivier Nyirubugara)

The question is to know why a government dominated by an ethnic community – the Tutsi [\[3\]](#) - that was victimized by the genocide, should force another community – the Hutu – also victimized by another unprecedented massacre to forget their past by assimilating it to the Tutsi’s. Kagame pronounced his speech on a site of mass killings in Murambi to celebrate the thirteenth anniversary of the genocide. Those of the Hutu survivors, including the lady from Byumba, heard once again that the killing of their parents, brothers, sisters, and friends in the soccer stadium was one of the ‘laudable acts’ by the RPF, whose only regret is to have allowed the escape of millions [of Hutu survivors]. This is what I consider to be a conflict of memory par excellence, which can be traced back to times immemorial. Lewis notes that

‘where there are conflicting loyalties or clashing interests, each [community] will have its own version of the past, its own presentation of the salient events’ (Lewis 1975: 55-6). To answer the why-question I have just posed, I will borrow Lewis’ thought about political authorities in early times who controlled people’s remembrances to “predict and even to control the future” (Lewis 1975: 55-6).

Dual Interpretations

As already mentioned, no so much has been written about the role of collective memory and remembrance in Rwanda’s tragedies. The 1994 genocide was like the culmination of a process that was wrongly understood by foreign observers, on top of whom the United Nations. In fact, no research has yet been conducted about how and what Rwandans remember, and, above all, why they do remember what they remember at a given moment of history, and forget it at a different time of that same history. Many instances drawn from Rwanda’s past show that cases like the one of the lady from Byumba abound, and those similar to the 2003 memory-killer census are numerous to allow researchers to come to some general conclusions. Rwanda is a good illustrative case of how a bloody armed conflict can originate from, and be fuelled by conflicting memories. And I am strongly convinced that this memory conflict played, and is still playing a decisive role in fuelling ethnic hatred on both sides. Any informed observer will realize that clashing memories in Rwanda were/are at the heart of all the tragedies, small and big, remembered or [voluntarily] discarded from collective memory, that that nation suffered along centuries. I can even assert that the role played by those memories were the most decisive factor in those conflicts.

Let me consider one earlier period, let’s say, the 1900s, and analyse how the different ethnic group experienced and then later interpreted it. This was a period that resembled much the pre-colonial one in that the monarch still had the death right, a great part of Rwandans were still vassals under the *Ubughake* system, while a smaller portion had privileges within that same system. As I was arguing, depending on one’s ethnic group, the Hutu servitude will be praised by some – the Tutsi – as having contributed to social harmony and peace until the ‘white man’ decided to ‘divide in order to reign’(Shyaka, p. 15) by inciting Hutu to emancipate, while others – the Hutu – will call it nameless bondage. The two lines are still in Rwandans’ minds and are showing no sign to disappear soon. Let me illustrate my point with a comparison between two Rwanda scholars’ understanding of the *Ubughake* system, an understanding that will show to which ethnic groups the scholars belong. [4] These scholars are Anastase Shyaka, director of the Centre for Conflict Management and lecturer at the National University of Rwanda, and Charles Nkurunziza, former lecturer of Law at the same university. Both authored two separate essays with the same title – *Le conflit rwandais*. For Shyaka:

L' Ubughake désigne le système rwandais ancien, où les éleveurs du gros bétail donnaient les vaches en usufruit à ceux qui n'en avaient pas en échange de services. Force est de souligner ici qu'un autre système équivalent appelé « Ubukonde », existait entre cultivateurs du Nord-Ouest du Rwanda. Son

The Ubughake refers to the system in ancient Rwanda, where cattle breeders granted cattle as usufruct to those who had none in return for services. It should be noted here that a similar system known as “Ubukonde” was in force among the cultivators in the North-West of

fonctionnement résidait dans la location de parcelles arables contre des produits vivriers : celui qui avait plus de terre en donnait à un client en échange d'une partie de sa récolte. Les systèmes d'Ubuhake et d'Ubukonde n'existent plus depuis des décennies. Cependant, un Himalaya de différences les sépare dans l'imaginaire socio-politique rwandais. L'Ubuhake reste perçu comme une source causale des conflits contemporains, tandis que l'Ubukonde ne représente aucun trait conflictuel. Cette différence est le produit des regards diamétralement opposés portés sur ces deux systèmes dès les premiers contacts avec l'Europe. Le premier a été racialisé, diabolisé et fétichisé et idéologiquement chargé. Le second n'eut pas le même traitement et c'est pourquoi il n'a pas laissé de germes conflictogènes. (Shyaka, p.11)

Rwanda. It consisted in renting arable plots of land in exchange for crops: the one who owned more land offered a plot to a client to receive part of his harvests in return. The “Ubuhake” and “Ubukonde” have ceased to exist for tens of years. However, a mountain of differences distinguish them in the Rwandan socio-political imagination. The Ubuhake system is still perceived as a source that still causes conflicts today, while the Ubukonde has no conflict-generation feature whatsoever. This difference is the result of the radically opposite views of the two systems since the first contacts with Europe. The former system was racialised, demonised, fetishized and given ideological significance. The latter received a different consideration and that is why it did not leave any conflict-generating germs. (Shyaka, p.11, Translation : O. Nyirubugara)

Contrary to Shyaka, Nkurunziza describes the *Ubuhake* system as follows:

C'était un système de relations sociopolitiques entre des individus ou, même, entre des institutions. Il était l'inspiration du contrat d'Ubugererwa des royaumes Hutu dont il est différent quant à son objet et à son but. L'objet de l'Ubuhake était la vache au lieu d'être la terre, et il avait lieu entre deux personnes se trouvant aux rangs sociaux différents. Le plus puissant s'engageait à protéger le faible ainsi que tous les siens dans toutes les circonstances et pour autant que leurs relations d'Ubuhake n'étaient pas définitivement interrompues. L'autre partie, quant à elle,

It was a system governing socio-political relations among individuals or even among institutions. It was inspired by the *Ubugererwa* contract practiced in the Hutu kingdoms, the only difference being its object and its objective. The object of the *Ubuhake* system was the cow instead of land, and it involved two individuals belonging to two different social categories. The most powerful offered protection to the weaker and his family under any circumstances and as long as their *Ubuhake* relationships were not definitively interrupted. The other party committed itself to perfectly executing all the orders given by his protector. Through this relationship,

s'engageait à exécuter parfaitement tous les ordres reçus de son protecteur. Par cet engagement, le protégé cessait de s'appartenir ou d'appartenir à sa famille pour devenir l'homme à la disposition de son patron. Signalons qu'en réalité, la vache ainsi reçue restait partie intégrante de la propriété du seigneur, le Mugaragu n'en étant que simple usufruitier. C'est-à-dire que, sous n'importe quel prétexte, le Shebuja pouvait reprendre toutes les vaches que le Mugaragu détenait. Même quiconque propriétaire de vaches obtenues en dehors d'Ubugake (imbata) pouvait se les voir dépouiller par un plus puissant, sans la possibilité d'aucun recours. Quand la situation allait bien, la relation entre les deux parties était héritée dans le même ordre, de père en fils pendant des générations entières... Par le truchement de l'Ubugake, le Tutsi voulait faire du Hutu un type d'hommes assujetti et essentiellement voué à son service (Nkurunziza, 2006)

the vassal ceased to belong to himself and to his family to be fully at his protector's disposal. It is worth mentioning here that the cow received under those circumstances remained part of the protector's property, the *Mugaragu* [vassal] being only usufructuary. This means that under whatever pretext, the *Shebuja* [protector] could take back all the cows that the *Mugaragu* had received. Even any one owning cows obtained outside the *Ubugake* system (cows known as *imbata*) could lose them to a more powerful than him, without any means of getting them back. When all went well, the relationship between the two parties was transmitted from father to son for generations... Through *Ubugake*, the Tutsi aimed to turn the Hutu into a subjugated man essentially dedicated to his [Tutsi's] service. (Nkurunziza, 2006. Translation: O. Nyirubugara)

The two quotes could be interpreted as follows: the son of the former *Umugaragu* and the one of the former *Shebuja* will hardly come to a common ground as to the nature of the social relationships of those days. The logical reason is that the former suffered from it while the other benefited from it.

More interestingly, this diverging understanding was at the heart of the political crises of the late 50s-early 60s and certainly in the early-mid 90s. During the Hutu emancipationist movement in the 1950s, the rejection of the *Ubugake*-based system by the Hutu vassals and their sons who had managed to go to school served as the basis of the movement. [5] As for the Tutsi who benefited from the system, they defended it as being the result of centuries of their forefathers' relentless efforts. [6] It is worth here giving the understanding of the *Ubugake* system by a non Rwandan scholar, Belgian law professor Filip Reyntjens. He defines the *Ubugake* as being a relationship system based on clientelism which allowed the Tutsi to have the monopoly of economic resources and politics, and to appropriate themselves all considerable parts of goods without participating in the production process. The system revolved around cattle which the protector gave to his vassal in return for services and was inherited on both sides (Reyntjens, 1975, p. 198). President Kagame's biographer Colin M.

Waugh adds that poorer Tutsi could become clients of wealthier ones, while Hutu labourers in turn became clients of less-elevated Tutsi, paying dues and providing labour in exchange for cattle. Like Reyntjens and Nkurunziza, Waugh admits that the *Ubuhake* system defined economic and social relationships among Rwandans (Waugh, 2004: 228).

Of the different ways of remembering the past, the one that is proclaimed as national memory in Rwanda depends on the relationship between the leaders in power and the pre-independence system. In other words, the official national memory that will be promoted in schools, textbooks, museums, libraries, films, arts, state media, street naming and calendrical celebrations will be the ethnic memory of the leader. In this respect, the first Republic leaders, on top of whom President Grégoire Kayibanda, proclaimed the Hutu memory as the national one, and this version was channelled through the above-mentioned memory vehicles. Mamdani (2001: 136) writes that in 1966, the government of Kayibanda took a number of measures regarding the educational system in Rwanda. Two of them were: (1-) all schools ever constructed with state subsidies became state property; and (2-) the removal of 'the choice of textbooks and curriculum from the sole jurisdiction of school authorities'. For Mamdani, 'the 1966 law provided an instrument for Hutu-izing control over a Tutsi dominated educational system'. Kayibanda's father, Léonidas Rwamanywa, was himself former vassal, *Umugaragu*, which contributed to the shaping of Kayibanda's political views regarding the system and its supporters. Aleida Assmann agrees with Susan Sontag that 'memory dies with each person', but argues that when the generation who experienced the past has passed away, the younger generation takes over and steps into the older generation's shoes. Assmann calls this phenomenon the "shift from a 'generation of experience' to a 'generation of confession' who identifies with the experience of their parents and grandparents and tries to transform it into a lasting and respected memory" (Assmann, 2006: 23-24). Quoting Kayibanda's personal notes about that episode of his father's life, Paternostre de la Mairie writes:

...il avait "comme tout le monde", travaillé pour les « autorités coutumières » locales...mais n'avait jamais accepté de se donner à la courtoisie, n'engageant que les loisirs laissés par ses propres travaux. Tout en s'efforçant de « tirer le meilleur parti » de la situation, il attendait la vache habituelle sans trop se plier, et s'était surtout refusé à engager ses enfants dans les liens de la clientèle pastorale « qu'il abhorrait ». (Paternostre de la Mairie, 1994 pp. 39-40)

...like "everybody else", he [Kayibanda's father] had worked for "customary authorities"...but had never accepted to engage in seeking favours, getting the only leisure allowed by his own labour. Doing all to get "the best" out of the situation, he waited for the usual cow without bowing down, and, above all, had refused to have his children involved in the cattle-based clientage that "he abhorred". (Paternostre de la Mairie, 1994 pp. 39-40. Translation : O. Nyirubugara)

As the first post-monarchy president, Kayibanda brought radical changes at all levels. All those who shared his hutu painful ethnic memories found in him their hero, while those with opposite memories who were fighting for the status quo found in him their enemy. Like the *Ubuhake*, the revolution that ended the system based on it was viewed differently as the

former vassals and their sons finally took power, sending most of their former masters and their sons into exile. Current president Paul Kagame represents the latter group as his father Deogratus was ‘related to the royal family of Mutara [III] Rudahigwa, and had enjoyed a close association with the king in his early career’. He was also a ‘property and cattle owner’ which allowed him to lead ‘a comfortable life’. As for Kagame’s mother Asteria, she ‘was very closely related to the queen [7] and so the family had access to the benefits of a position in traditional Rwandan society’. Waugh quotes Kagame as saying that his father could have become a chief [8], but he did not like it, preferring to do business (Waugh, 2004: 8). With this background and based on my arguments about ethnic memory, it would not be astonishing that Kagame would view the November 1959 revolution as a mini-genocide, [9] not as a change of power that brought those who made his father’s fortune [10] to the leading position.

Ethnic Memory Reminders

In the late 50s-early 60s, Rwanda was in its most intensive political period. Both Hutu and Tutsi elites were fighting with different ideologies and contradicting arguments. I would like to pick out only memory issues that so far have been neglected, but which I think deserve more attention. On 23 March 1960, the Special Provisional Council, [11] a body created by the Belgian administration after the November 1959 riots that strongly weakened the monarchy, addressed a number of measures to the king, Kigeri V Ndahindurwa. The most revolutionary measure was the banning of the Kalinga royal drum and its replacement by a flag. While all the political parties unconditionally backed the measure, monarchist UNAR [*Union Nationale Rwandaise*] suggested that such a measure would only be accepted after a referendum on the question. (Nkundabagenzi, p. 199-201). Reacting to that proposal one month later, King Ndahindurwa wrote:

Cette question touchant à la dynastie et à la société ruandaise, est capitale et fondamentale. Elle ne peut être traitée de façon aussi sommaire et par un Conseil provisoire peu représentatif. Il faudrait qu'elle soit étudiée par un organe plus représentatif, spécialement celui qui sera chargé d'élaborer la constitution.
(Nkundabagenzi, p. 199-201-2)

That issue relating to the dynasty and to the Rwandan society is crucial and fundamental. It cannot be dealt with so summarily by a Provisional Council that is not representative. It should be considered by a more representative organ, especially the one in charge of drafting the Constitution. (Nkundabagenzi, p. 199-201-2. Translation : O. Nyirubugara)

Why should a drum be the cause of a political impasse? King Ndahindurwa answers: because it is crucial to the [Nyiginya-Tutsi] dynasty and to the Rwandans. Why then was it crucial to the dynasty? Writing about its introduction by king Ruganzu II Ndoli around 1580, Alexis Kagame tells the story of Rwoga – Kalinga’s predecessor - which the Banyabungo [12] had taken after defeating King Ndahiro II Cyamatare. In the eleven years that separated Ruganzu’s return from Karagwe (east of current Tanzania) and the death of his father Cyamatare, Rwanda had no royal drum and the situation was dramatic. A popular legend about this period has entered Rwanda’s collective memory:

La légende se donne libre cours au sujet de cette époque de "veuvage". A l'en croire, il n'y avait plus naissance d'hommes ni de bêtes, il se produisit une sécheresse telle, que les cornes des vaches dégageaient de la fumée par leurs pointes...malheurs inhérents à l'absence du Roi légitime à la tête du Rwanda! L'intronisation de Ruganzu II Ndoli délia, comme par enchantement, toute la nature qui reprit instantanément son cours normal.... Il inaugura le Tambour-Emblème, le Kalinga actuel, succédant au Rwoga "fait prisonnier". (Kagame, 1951: 30-50)

The legend speculates about that period of 'widowhood'. According to it, there were no births among men and beasts, there was such a severe drought that smoke came out of cattle's horns...all these misfortunes were due to the absence of the legitimate king on Rwanda's throne! The enthronisation of Ruganzu II Ndoli instantly changed the situation which became normal....He inaugurated the new royal drum Kalinga to succeed the taken Rwoga. (Kagame, 1951: 30-50. Translation: O. Nyirubugara)

The Kalinga drum symbolised not only Banyiginya's power and supremacy over the rest of Rwanda's populations, but also and above all, it summarised the long blood-tainted history of the making process of Rwanda. With the introduction of Kalinga, the Tutsi started ornamenting the royal drum with the testicles of the defeated [and assassinated] Hutu kings to symbolise their definitive political extinction. Before this memory-keeping gesture, the King had to make sure that the slain Hutu king left no male descendent. Historian Ferdinand Nahimana notes that King Ruganzu II Ndori not only killed in the 17th century the Bugara hutu King Nzira, son of Muramira, but also decimated all his male descent (Nahimana, 1993: 9). He also relates a similar story with the Nduga King Mashira who was taken into a marriage trap set by Tutsi King Mibambwe I Sekarongoro I Mutabazi I. He was assassinated by the latter together with all his male descent (Nahimana, 1993: 9). The sexual organs of Nzira, Mashira, and other Hutu Kings were ornamenting the royal drum, making the proud of the victorious Kings and their descent.

It was until the late 50s-early 60s that the Hutu elite realised that they could not be politically at ease with the testicles of their forefathers still ornamenting the Kalinga. This explains why the ban of that drum was so essential for the Hutu emancipationists. Mamdani (2001: 119) remarks that Hutu's focus at that time was on that prime symbol of Tutsi power as it signified 'a permanent vision of Hutu inferiority'. From King Ndahindurwa's arguments, one understands that the drum was crucial to the dynasty because of its memory-keeping function which maintained his dynasty and ethnic group in an eternal superior position. Reflecting on the Hutu-Tutsi memory conflict, Hutu emancipationist leader Joseph Gitera [13] argued that the Tutsi kings violently conquered the Hutu masses, marching on the corpses of their kings, using women as traps. (Nahimana, 2007: 83). Regarding the testicles of the Hutu kings still hanging on Kalinga, Gitera mentioned his visit to the King Mutara III Rudahigwa 1958: [14]

Comme protocole de réconciliation nationale, nous demandions que les

As reconciliation protocol, we demanded that the venerable corpses

vénérables dépouilles de nos ancêtres qui pendaient attachées sur le Kalinga [tambour royal] en signe d'ignominieux servage à jamais, et trophées immortelles, soient descendues et reçoivent officiellement une sépulture honorable. Rudahigwa et sont entourage ébahi et furieux nous déclarent : « Il n'y a pas de problème Hutu-Tutsi au Rwanda : car il n'y a pas de fraternité entre les Tutsi et les Hutu au Rwanda, ils n'ont rien de commun, sinon 'domination et servage' » (Nahimana, 2007: 83)

of our ancestors that hanged on the Kalinga [royal drum] to symbolise the ignominious bondage forever, and the immortal trophies, be removed and officially and honourably buried. Astounded and furious, Rudahigwa and his entourage responded: "There is no Hutu-Tutsi problem in Rwanda, as there is no brotherly relationship between Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda. They have nothing in common but 'domination and bondage'". (Nahimana, 2007: 83. Translation: O. Nyirubugara)

At this stage, the political debate is dominated not by diverging political agendas, but just by diverging visions of a common past. While the Tutsi monarchy was proud of the Kalinga, its ornament and its history, the Hutu felt humiliated by it. I could extend this section to other ethnic memory reminders that opposed and still oppose the two major ethnic groups in Rwanda, but this would require a full-length study dedicated to that subject. However, the next section relates to this issue but from a different perspective, namely the name.

Memory Names

Most non-informed foreigners keep asking questions about Rwandans' names: Why are they so long and so complicated to pronounce [even to understand] ? Why do brothers and sisters have different names while they have the same parents? I will give the answers to these questions with my personal experience in the Netherlands. In March 2005 during one of my visits to my municipality prior to the birth of my daughter, I discovered one folder that particularly drew my attention. The folder was a summary of the Dutch *naamwet*, the 1998 law governing the naming of newly-born children. I retained that the children must have either the name of the father or of the mother. I already knew this but I was thinking that the law was leaving some flexibility to those from other cultures to keep on with their traditions. I even asked the person who received me whether there were other options but she answered me by quoting from the same folder I was holding. This could appear to be a small detail but to someone like me, coming from memory-bound Rwanda, it was a shock. It was a point where the past and the future broke off. I was getting ready to put a sudden and unwanted end to an age-long tradition according to which the father names the child according to her gender and circumstances surrounding his/her birth. These circumstances could be glorious (won battle), painful (death, defeat, famine), socially-descriptive (boss-client, friend-enemy relationships), and so on. Whatever the case, the name is formulated in such a way that the gender of the bearer will be self-evident. The reality now is that my daughter bears a male name, simply because she was born far from home. In Rwanda and neighbouring countries, the name has a huge social function: it briefly defines who the bearer is. A saying from Rwanda summarises my point: 'name is man' [*izina ni ryo muntu*]. Another one completes it: 'receiving a bad name from your father does not mean he hates you' [*so ntakwanga akwita nabi*].

I should also say that most names are part of any family's collective memory as they relate the past of that very family. The names describe a certain situation that one specific generation went through. By interpreting these names over ten or twenty generations, one has the story of his whole ancestry, which does not necessitate written records. Suddenly breaking the chain made me understood, with some bitterness I should say, the thought of cinema icon Luis Bunuel that:

You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all...Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing... [15]

After this quick introduction to the naming tradition in Rwanda, let us move to the implications of names in perpetuating violence memories in the Rwandan society. To keep loyal to my mythology in the previous sections, I will pick one historically significant period/event, namely the 1990-1994 war.

Talking of the 1990-1994 war is first of all exploring the creation of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi-diaspora dominated movement based in Uganda. The first significant political organisation of the Tutsi refugees dates back to 1979 with the creation of RANU, the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (Waugh, 2004: 16). Any alert reader will immediately associate this organisation to UNAR for two major and obvious reasons: Firstly, the founders and supporters of the monarchist UNAR party in the late 50s-early 60s had all fled mostly to Uganda and had kept their ideology for which they militarily fought until the late 60s. Secondly, the two acronyms have exactly the same letters, which pushes to suggest that the new English name keeps the core Unarist ideology alive while camouflaging its external appearance. This is the movement that changed the name in 1987 to become RPF (Waugh, 2004: 39). UNAR in the Hutu ethnic memory represents the monarchy, a system that killed Hutu kings and their male descents and kept survivals in bondage for centuries. Beside this UNAR connection, the RPF added another memory-charged name of *Inkotanyi* (Waugh, 2004: 39), which, once again, is viewed differently depending to one's ethnic memory. Like the other kings with Kigeri [16] as royal name, Kigeri IV Rwabugiri (1853-1897) [17], who nicknamed himself *Inkotanyi cyane* [the redoubtable fighter], was the most feared warlike monarch of the Rwandan history. According to Alexis Kagame:

Ce prince, dernier Roi guerrier, fut un batailleur infatigable, à l'exemple de ses trois homonymes de l'ascendance. Toutes les régions limitrophes du Rwanda, à l'exception du Karagwe, furent l'objet d'innombrables expéditions auxquelles le Roi prenait presque toujours part. On peut dire qu'il fut le fléau des princes autochtones dont les territoires se trouvaient à sa portée. Ses ravages se firent surtout à l'Ouest, dans les régions orientales du Congo et dans les principautés de l'actuel Protectorat

That prince, the last warlike King, was a tireless combatant, like his homonym predecessors. All the regions bordering Rwanda, except Karagwe, were targeted by his innumerable expeditions to which he almost always took part. One can say that he was the pest of autochthon princes whose territories lied within his reach. His ravages were mostly noticeable in the West, in the eastern regions of the Congo and in the principdoms of

de l'Uganda, zone traditionnellement de réserve, où le Rwanda avait l'habitude de s'enrichir en bovidés.(Kagame 1951 : 30-50)

the current protectorate of Uganda, an area that usually served as reserve from where Rwanda used to get cattle supplies.

(Kagame 1951 : 30-50. Translation: O. Nyirubugara)

Like Kagame, Nahimana (1993: 242) depicts Rwabugiri as the one who ended the peaceful cohabitation between the Tutsi kingdom of Rwanda and the neighbouring Hutu kingdoms in the north and north-west. He not only sought to impose himself militarily, but he also obliged local Hutu armies to join his own army. Nahimana writes:

Cette situation déclencha des tensions entre Rwabugiri et les abami [kings] des royaumes du nord et du nord-ouest qui réalisaient que leur indépendance était enfin sérieusement menacée. Il y eu ici et là des affrontements armés entre les guerriers de Rwabugiri et les populations du nord et du nord-ouest. (Nahimana, 1993 : 243)

That situation resulted in tensions between Rwabugiri and the [Hutu] kings of the kingdoms in the north and north-west who were realising that their independence was finally in jeopardy. There were here and there armed confrontations between Rwabugiri's fighters and the populations in the north and north-west. (Nahimana, 1993: 243. Translation: O. Nyirubugara)

Mamdani (2001: 69 and 117) perceives Rwabugiri's move in the north and north-west as an effort to reform the state structure by centralizing it and expanding it to the Hutu through their [non-obligatory] participation to the army.

Choosing the name *Inkotanyi* to nickname a Tutsi-dominated modern rebel movement was a strong indication not only as to the connection of the present and the past, but also as to the intentions, plans, and methods of the new *Rwabugiris*. On the Hutu side, where the RPF invaders were quickly perceived as the 'revolutionary chickens returning home' (Mamdani, 2001: 36), the names for political parties and groups were also seriously thought out to try and connect the past and the present. At the time when the 'reborn UNAR' attacked Rwanda in 1990 with Rwabugiri as their idol, a multiparty system was being put in place in Rwanda. One of the parties to emerge from the Hutu opposition was the MDR, a surname that Kayibanda's emancipationist movement Parmehutu gave itself in 1960, when it became clear that King Ndahindurwa was not yielding to their demands. The reborn Hutu *Movement Démocratique Républicain* was this time led by Kayibanda's son-in-law Faustin Twagiramungu, with a strong bastion in Gitarama, Kayinda's home place. Although the name and the leader did not follow Kayibanda's lines towards UNAR, the name kept its significance in conquering Hutu masses throughout Rwanda. During the 1993 political crisis within the MDR, the party split into two factions, one known as MDR-Power, and a microscopic one called MDR-Twagiramungu (Gasana, 2005: 222-223). While the former started identifying itself with

Parmehutu, the latter adopted a closer position toward the RPF. In a tactical move that could be perceived as a reconciliation with the humiliated first Republic leaders, [18] the former ruling party, the *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* (MRND) [19] chose the name *Interahamwe* [Those who work together, those who have the same objective] for its youth organisation that later turned into a militia. That name refers to Kayibanda's supporters during the Hutu emancipationist movement, and was immortalised in the Hutu ethnic memory by a famous song by the Abanyuramatwi choir. [20] Titled *Jya Mbere Rwanda* (Go forward Rwanda!), the song goes as follows:

<i>Jya mbere Rwanda</i>	Go forward Rwanda
<i>Ushyigikiwe n'abagabo</i>	Your supporters have the same objective
<i>b'interahamwe</i>	The Parmehutu leaders were elected by the
<i>Abaparmehutu batowe</i>	people
<i>n'abaturage</i>	And with your strong government
<i>Na Leta yarwo ihamye</i>	Go forward in every sector
<i>Rwanda jya mbere muri byose.</i>	
<i>U Rwanda rwari rute?</i>	How was Rwanda [before]?
<i>Kazungu na Gatutsi bari</i>	The white man and the Tutsi had swallowed it
<i>barumize</i>	Pushing back the Hutu
<i>Basubiza inyuma Gahutu kandi</i>	Whereas Rwanda was theirs [Hutu's]
<i>ari nyirarwo</i>	...
...	How was Rwanda before?
<i>U Rwanda rwari rute?</i>	The white man and the Tutsi did not understand
<i>Kazungu na Gatutsi</i>	each other.
<i>ntibumvikanaga</i>	When the white man said anything, the Tutsi
<i>Kazungu yavuga Gatutsi ati:</i>	would respond: Yes Sir!...
<i>Ndiyo Bwana.</i>	
...	On their side, the Hutu were vigilant.
<i>Gahutu we ari maso</i>	They resolved to send for their companions.
<i>Yigira inama maze atuma kuri</i>	The most eminent among these
<i>bagenzi be</i>	addressed the King for the first time and told
<i>Aribo b'imena bafashe ijambo</i>	him
<i>bwa mbere</i>	That they rejected injustice
<i>Nibwo babwiye umwami</i>	
<i>Ko batemeye akarengane</i>	(Author's audio archive. Translation: O.
...	Nyirubugara)
(Author's audio archive)	

The term *Interahamwe* was thus initially like a blow to the Parmehutu's heir, MDR, who chose *Inkuba* (thunder) as the name for its youth organ. It also sent a message to the UNAR's heir, RPF, that those who defeated their forefathers in the 60s would put their forces together to repeat their forefathers' actions. I could endlessly go on with memory-charged names and their uses in the various tragic periods that Rwanda went through. My point here was to demonstrate that traditionally, Rwandans name their children, their associations and political, military organisations according to their memories. In many cases, these memories have been

and are still being used to transmit painful and harmful memories from generation to generation.

Conclusion

My arguments in this essay are that the different ethnic conflicts in Rwanda have been much more memory conflicts than anything else. Some would argue that the Hutu-Tutsi conflict resulted from colonization rather than from any pre-colonisation expansionist ambition of the Tutsi kings. I would reject this asking about the role the white man played in telling Rwandans how to call their children, their fighting armies and political parties. Even now, half a century after Rwanda's independence, Rwandans keep calling their children and associations memory names. I would also ask about the role played by the colonizer in the making of supremacist myths and legends. [21] I would finally ask what magic power the Germans and Belgians had in castrating Hutu kings and hanging their testicles on one of the strongest memory-reminders, i.e. Kalinga, centuries before their coming. Throughout this essay, I repeatedly showed situations where those in power view one particular event differently from their predecessors, especially when the new leaders have received a different ethnic memory. Thus, Rwanda's rulers need[ed] not only the interpretation of the past (Plumb, 2004: 27), but also its creation – for future purposes - to justify the authority of their government. In other words, 'those who are in power control to a large extent the presentation of the past, and seek to make sure that it is presented in such a way as to buttress and legitimize their own authority' (Lewis, 1975: 53). Simply, I would say with a great amount of conviction, that Rwanda's story – I refrain from calling it History – is made by those who take advantage of the amnesty offered by their privileged situation on power to force the underprivileged ethnic group into total amnesia with regard to its own story.

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Notes

1. Jack H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past*, New York : 2004, p.11
2. Abdul Ruzibiza, *RWANDA: Histoire secrète*, Paris: 2005, pp.274-6
3. President Paul Kagame's biographer Colin M. Waugh surprisingly reveals the ethnic reality within the RPF administration. He writes that 'the RPF had skilfully managed to draw on the support of moderate Hutus opposed to the former Kigali regime. The first president of the transitional government, Pasteur Bizimungu, the new regime's second prime minister Pierre-Célestin Rwigema, and Interior Minister Seth Sendashonga were all prominent Hutus and each gave a semblance of multi-ethnicity to the regime...The façade of multi-ethnicity crumbled quickly and Kagame increasingly found himself forced into the stance which he had long sought to avoid: that of an embattled military dictator, maintaining power by force and internal repression, representing the interests of only a minority of the total population he purported to govern' (Waugh, 2004: 149)
4. Quoting a colleague of his from Nigeria who was attending a conference on Rwanda and Burundi in 1995, Mahmood Mamdani (2001: 42) writes 'he [the colleague] could close his eyes and tell the identity of a speaker by the twist of his or her argument: if a person claims that there was no difference between Hutu and Tutsi, or that the difference was one of class, the speaker was most likely a Tutsi. A Hutu intellectual was more likely to argue otherwise, that the difference was one of distinct groups, ethnic or even racial'
5. The 1957 Manifeste des Bahutu (Hutu Manifesto) served as the basis for the emancipationist movement. This document reads: 'The current situation presents a big misbalance created by the old socio-political structure in Rwanda, namely the Ubugukwa...Witohut ignoring the Hutu's deficiencies, we think that each race and each class has its own et we would like to correct that instead of systematically pushing the Hutu back into the eternally inferior situation...' (Nkundabagenzi, p. 21-9).
6. The conservative Tutsi élite reacted to the Manifeste des Bahutu with two letters, among others. The Premier écrit de Nyanza portrays the superiority of the Tutsi race and rejects the equality demands of the Hutu arguing : 'Since our kings conquered the Hutu's countries killing their kings and enslaved the Hutu, how can the latter now claim to be our brothers' (Nkundabagenzi, p. 35-6). The second letter, the Deuxième écrit de Nyanza, rejects another demand by the Hutus who were demanding the sharing of pastures and cattle with their masters (Nkundabagenzi, p. 36-7).
7. Waugh further writes that Kagame's mother Asteria was the sister of Rosalie Gicanda, the wife of King Mutara III Rudahigwa. (Waugh, 2004:12)
8. King's official representative

9. The description that Paul Kagame makes of his flight from Nyarutovu (Gitarama) gives a clear idea as to the mini-genocidal character that he gives to the 1959 events (Waugh, 2004: 7)
10. In 1957, the future president of the first Republic Grégoire Kayibanda was elected chairman of the managing board of Trafipro, the biggest commercial cooperative of those days. (Paternostre de la Mairie, 1994, p. 129). According to Waugh, Trafipro was founded by Kagame's father and was the first parastatal organisation opened to non-Tutsi (Waugh, 2001: 233). Waugh's argument is strongly challenged by Mamdani who indicates that Trafipro was rather founded by the Catholic church in 1956, and that from then on, the cooperative served as 'cells for the development of the Hutu movement' (Mamdani, 2001: 118). This makes any involvement the Tutsi aristocracy –Kagame's father - almost unthinkable.
11. The Special Provisional Council comprised the Rwanda counsellors, the Special Resident, and the leaders of the four main parties [Parmehutu, Aprosoma, UNAR, and RADER] (Nkundabagenzi, p. 199-201).
12. The Bunyabungo region is across Lake Kivu in the current Democratic Republic of the Congo.
13. Until the 1960, Joseph Gitera was the most prominent Hutu leader known especially for his outspokenness. He led the November 1959 Jacquerie that turned into a social revolution. He headed the Hutu delegation that met King Mutara III Rudahigwa in 1958. He was later marginalised due to his lack of political stability and his lack of nationwide political basis.
14. Also see Waugh, 2004, p. 233.
15. Luis Bunuel quoted in Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.1
16. The royal names of Kigeri and Mibambwe gave the bearer the mission to expand Rwanda by war (Nkurunziza, 2004)
17. This Rwabugiri's reign period (1853-1897) is provided by Alexis Kagame (1951: 30-50) where he says that it is almost certain. It is however different from the period (1860-1895) indicated by Mahmood Mamdani (2001: 69).
18. Grégoire Kayibanda and his close collaborators from the centre and south of Rwanda were arrested following the 5 July 1973 coup by Juvenal Habyarimana from the north. Many of them died while in detention, either assassinated or for lack of appropriate medical care. This heralded a conflict between the centre-south and the north. More details in Gasana, Rwanda : du parti-Etat à l'Etat-Garnison , Paris : 2005.
19. The meaning the of the acronym MRND later changed into *Mouvement Républicain National pour le Développement et la Démocratie*.
20. The Abanyuramatwi choir's songs were exclusively about the road to the First Republic and the early years of that Republic from the Hutu perspective. Their songs are a short musical summary of the Hutu ethnic memory for the early 50s-late 60s emancipationist movement and the subsequent republic.
21. Myths, legends and tales are other very important ethnic memory vehicles that until now. More about them can be found in the conclusion of Nyirubugara, Rwanda: *The Genocide Ideology Then and Now* (February 2008) and in Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killer* (2001: 76-87)