



## Cahiers d'études africaines

173-174 | 2004

Réparations, restitutions, réconciliations

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# Engaging with the Past to Engage with the Future

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### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/4684>

DOI: 10.4000/etudesafriaines.4684

ISSN: 1777-5353

### Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

### Printed version

Date of publication: 1 January 2004

Number of pages: 430-431

ISBN: 978-2-7132-1823-1

ISSN: 0008-0055

### Electronic reference

David Newbury, « Engaging with the Past to Engage with the Future », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online], 173-174 | 2004, Online since 08 March 2007, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/4684> ; DOI : 10.4000/etudesafriaines.4684

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conditions must be fulfilled: the commission must have broad public support; members of the commission must be representative of Burundi's different groups; and selection of the members should be conducted in a nonpartisan fashion.

Nsanze's analysis seems to show why establishing those conditions is unlikely. While agreeing that a rupture with the past is needed, Nsanze means something different by this than Mukuri. The "past" to which Nsanze refers includes the legacy of colonialism and the Burundi monarchy, as well as the history of the Republic in Burundi from 1966. For Nsanze, the legacy of inequality and oppression from these earlier periods is still present in Burundi today. Moreover, the experience of the Republic, in which a minority seized power in the name of racial superiority, excluding the majority of the population from power and denying them political rights, has yet to be transcended. This minority still controls military might. That is what needs to change, Nsanze argues. He advocates a shift to majority rule in both Rwanda and Burundi as the prerequisite for peace in Burundi, Rwanda, and the larger Great Lakes region. Without that, if the past lives on in the present, he argues, effective mourning is not possible.

Thus, while Mukuri favors a type of judicial proceeding that allocates blame and provides for restitution, Nsanze calls for more systemic change that would alter the inequalities of power and wealth that pervade Burundi (and Rwanda). Mukuri, expressing faith in a narrowly defined process that appears feasible, concludes with a cautiously optimistic prognosis. Nsanze, emphasizing the constraints to systemic change that he believes impede effective mourning, perceives an impasse that makes him deeply pessimistic.

The commonalities as well as the polarities in these texts are instructive. Critical appraisal of the strengths and shortcomings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa<sup>13</sup> could provide insights on the likely impact of such a process in Burundi. Meanwhile, it is clear that promoting a process of mourning in Burundi will require coming to terms with divergent perceptions of the past (and the lived present), as well as discussion and analysis of more hopeful imagined futures.

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### Engaging with the Past to Engage with the Future: Two Visions of History

These two texts are starkly different. One looks to the future, the other to the past. One is programmatic, the other analytic. One focuses on victims, the other on causes. One is concerned with individual suffering, the other with state power.

13. For such an appraisal, see Bogumil JEWSIEWICKI, "De la vérité de mémoire à la réconciliation: Comment travaille le souvenir?", *Le Débat*, no. 122 (novembre-décembre 2002), pp. 63-77.

The differences are not simply in “approach”; there is a more fundamental difference between the two: the one focuses on personal tragedy, the other on political tragedy. The two go together, but the fact that victims are found in each category does not mean that each category is equally responsible: there is a difference between individual crime and state policy, and the difference resides in the presence of state power. In contexts where the judicial system is encapsulated within state power, it is impossible to rely on courts. Under those circumstances the state cannot rectify itself, and therefore the first step must be to analyze the state system, not erase it from our vision; a political problem requires political analysis.

In short, what operates successfully at the personal level, between individuals, does not always operate successfully at the political level, at the level of the state. To equate the two levels is to substitute form for context; the two are not the same. (It is worth noting that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was not established by the apartheid regime. Instead it was initiated by a government which held the support of the vast majority of the community who were the victims of with terror.)

The two papers also differ in their sense of inclusiveness and in their vision of agency. While both accept the pain of the victim, only one sees that as the result of specific historical actions. Seeing history as the product of specific human actions in the past—even harmful actions—nonetheless empowers people in the present to create their future. A history that recognizes responsibility for the future therefore, must be inclusive: the perpetrator must recognize the victim and the victim must recognize the perpetrator. History that erases the former encourages impunity; history that neglects the latter encourages vengeance.

To move beyond the past is first to recognize it. To do this, two elements are necessary. The first one is an acceptance of a common past (though not an equivalent past); such a vision acknowledges anger. The second element is acceptance of a common future; such a vision limits anger. Fully incorporating these two elements, then, is the first step to a future that differs from the past.

Thus these differing historical presentations are revealing, not least by illustrating the steps that need to be made: one needs to acknowledge diverse pasts; the other needs to commit to a shared future. Each can do so without relinquishing their current position, since each is part of the other.

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## La mémoire en rivale de l'histoire

Aujourd'hui, tous les Barundi, Tutsi, Hutu, Twa, chacun à leur façon (mais rarement en commun, encore moins en communion) portent le deuil des proches et des amis qui ont été victimes des incessantes tueries qui ont