

# For Rwanda, the Muse Report is Refusal of Historical Amnesia

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During his famous conference, “What is a nation?”, delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882, the French intellectual Ernest Renan explained the importance of historical amnesia in building a nation. We must forget because “acts of violence” have often given birth to progress. To remember is to bring to the surface a reality that can lead to divisions, and therefore weaken the nation.

Renan’s argument lacks nuance. But his speech was foundational : the French conception of the nation stems from the ideas of Renan. The trouble is that the French seem to believe that historical amnesia should extend to their relations with African countries. African leaders installed by French power at the helm of French-speaking African states after decolonization agree, which is why they have always ignored the issue of France’s historical legacy in Africa.

Rwanda is different, as eviden-

ced by the release of the Muse Report, commissioned by the government of Rwanda of the American law firm LFM (Levy, Firestone, Muse) in 2017, to shed light on “the role of the French government in connection with the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, one of the most monstrous atrocities of the 20th century”.

The report is clear on Rwanda’s relationship to the issue of historical amnesia : “One of the reasons Rwanda has commissioned this inquiry is that the Genocide, perhaps faint in the memory of many of the French officials who made the most consequential decisions affecting its outcome, remains a visceral, daily reality for most Rwandans. Their ordeals defy language and demonstrate, yet again, that a genocide has no half-life. It will impair its survivors and their descendants for generations. That is the ultimate cost of what happened in

Rwanda. Any assessment of the role and responsibility of the French government must acknowledge not only French actions, but the suffering enabled by those actions”.

For a majority of the French political class, the genocide committed against the Tutsi is part of the many unfortunate episodes in France’s long history. It may be a little more embarrassing than others, but it remains a political problem.

For Rwanda, however, it is first and foremost a human tragedy. This difference can be seen in the approach of the Duclert and Muse Reports. The first, which almost everyone has recognized as a breakthrough, is intended to be ”scientific” : ”all assertions and analyzes are documented.” It does not contain oral testimony (this is explained in the preface).

However, the Muse Report is just as methodologically rigorous as the Duclert Report, and it contains testimonials. Far from diminishing the ”scientific” scope of the work of lawyers, these testimonies are crucial because they come from survivors, who tell us about their pain, invite us to remain mobilized against the denial Hydra, and remind us that one cannot fully comprehend the Genocide committed against the Tutsi without listening to survivors. Therefore, not only must the quest for the historical truth about its causes, how it unfolded, the responsibilities of lo-

cal actors and their foreign accomplices, especially French ones, continue to the end, but it must also integrate the truth of survivors.

One of the survivors who speak out in the report is Emmanuel Gasana. “Before the war, Emmanuel Gasana did not know his ethnicity : ”My family never used to discuss ethnic groups. . . I only came to realize about my ethnic group when I was in Primary Three, when the teacher called pupils of one ethnic group to stand up. Hutu pupils would stand proudly, but when it was the Tutsis’ turn, other kids would yell at you and humiliate you...”.

The day after the assassination of President Habyarimana, “Gasana’s mother came home and told him and his siblings that ”we, the Tutsis, are soon going to be killed.” In the chaos that followed, they were separated”. Gasana did what he could to survive, “at one point pretending to be one of the assailants—he and a friend got across a roadway by carrying a corpse” : ”All the way, I saw the most horrible scenes of my life. . . . When we got to the other side, I saw a man who was originally from my Grandma’s sector. He was standing on a pile of corpses, holding a big, nailed club. He was searching the victims’ pockets, stripping them of anything he thought was valuable.... In the time we crossed the street, he had clubbed three people to death”.

Gasana never saw his mother again. At first, she hid in "a part-Hutu family". But she fell ill. The family who hosted him subsequently fled in the face of advancing RPF troops : "My Mum couldn't walk by then ; she was very weak. So they took her and put her in the banana plantation. She stayed there in the cold, in the rain ; she was starving and ill and had no treatment. . . She got weaker and weaker until dogs started coming around her, pulling her clothes till they ate her. . . That's how she died."

Over 616 pages, the Muse Report explores a question that haunts survivors, occupies the minds of Rwandans, and should concern the international community : could this descent into hell have been avoided? The report's answer is yes : the Genocide committed against the Tutsi was "foreseeable". France had the means to spare the world "one of the darkest events of the twentieth century" but

did not.

The report, therefore, concludes that "The government of France bears responsibility for enabling a foreseeable genocide. The world is still waiting for the French government's full acceptance of responsibility."

Emmanuel Gasana was 15 years old at the time of the genocide against the Tutsi. He is now 42. President Macron is 43 – same generation. He is expected in Rwanda in the coming months. Perhaps he will meet Emmanuel Gasana, "who eventually became a guide at the Kigali Memorial Center"? If so, based on the findings of the Muse Report, what would he say to him, and through him to the Rwandan people? His political legacy will also depend on it. One thing is sure though : Emmanuel Gasana and other survivors will never indulge in amnesia....

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