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The Politics of Identity the Politics of Recognition. A reflection on Rwanda.doc

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Introduction
The aim of political activity is the just organisation of the state. This entails the rulership of good leaders that will protect citizens from both internal and external aggression, and facilitate the enhancement of the good life of individual members of the state. Unfortunately today, politicians and leaders pursue their own interests, and this leads to marginalization, oppression, and domination of individuals or groups by more powerful individuals or groups. There is no concern for the dignity of others as long as the interests of only the influential and affluent citizens are pursued. This paper argues that politics practised thus as a struggle for domination and quest for the selfish interest of the leaders is a perverted conception of politics. People operating on a perverted notion of politics have often employed ethnic identity as a rallying point to secure, maintain and further the interests and good of members of that group.

With specific reference to Rwanda, this paper discusses the politics of ethnic identity in Rwanda, and then applies Charles Taylor’s *The Politics of Recognition* to Rwanda. In discussing the politics of ethnic identities in Rwanda, the paper distinguished between ethnicity and politicised ethnicity, with a particular focus on the latter. Politicised ethnic identities are manifestations of political practice devoid of the ethics of responsibility, human dignity and authenticity. Rwanda is a clear example of a political environment where the memory of oppression, domination and marginalization of the peoples in different periods led to the politicisation of ethnic identities. Though there are many forms of identity politics, this paper is interested in the politics of ethnic identities in Rwanda. To the examination of the

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¹ This paper was written in 2006 while the author was a student of Arrupe College, Jesuit School of Philosophy and Humanities, Harare, Zimbabwe.
politics of identity in Rwanda the paper now turn.

**The Politics of Ethnic Identity**

This paper understands ethnicity as a group of people living together with a homogenous language and cultural constituents, goals, values and practices; and this people have a sense of shared history and solidarity, and believe in their shared ancestral ties. A distinction is important here between ethnicity and politicised ethnicity. With ethnicity politicised, ethnic identities move away from the emphasis on cultural attributes such as language, customs, and origins (not that they are not important) to the political behaviour of ethnic identities, which is manifested when an ethnic group interacts with other ethnic groups. Hendricks (1997:106) says that in this case, the “cultural and/or other markers [that] become important is dependent upon the nature of the conflict”. Since politicised ethnic identities in this case are dependent on the type of conflict an ethnic group is engaged in, politicised ethnic identities are said to be a social construction dependent on group relationships. For example, ethnic groups that are far from the centre of power, and see themselves as marginalised in relation to the other(s) in society may feel dissatisfied. Therefore, ethnic protest, nationalism and politics result because of a group’s relationship to power, be it social, economic or political power. If an ethnic group feels deprived or marginalized, its members rally around its ethnic identity for political participation. In some cases in Africa, self-interested leaders manipulate ethnic bonds for political achievement.

In ethnic identity politics, shared culture, language and common ancestry ties, real or imagined, are not as important as the political behaviour of ethnic groups. This is because politicised ethnic identities are also communities of collective memory. A people may develop a common consciousness that demarcates them from other ethnic groups, if they feel that they share the same political experience different from people of other ethnic groups but of the same society. This is one of the reasons for internal differentiation within an ethnic group. In an interesting book, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*, Irwin-Zarecka (1994: 47) argues that, “for people to feel a sense of bonding with others solely because of shared experience, the experience itself would often be of extraordinary if not traumatic quality”. This experience would be such that it could not be shared with other people, at least not at the same level of understanding.

It is not only victims that belong to this community of collective memory. In due course, the
bond created by such experience extends “to those for whom remembrance of that trauma acts as a key orienting force for their lives and public action. What underlies that bonding, though, or what defines the community through its many transitions, is a shared, if not always explicated, meaning given to the experience itself” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 48-49). What is meant here is that what creates a community of memory is the meaning that a people give to the event and not the event itself.

An experience of victimization binds people into a community of collective experience because, first, people with similar experience of victimization tend to unite because of the emotional strength of their experience. Secondly, the very definition of the word victim “clearly marks the boundary between “us” and “them” in ways only matched by kinship ties” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994:60). There is a rallying power that is inherent in a shared memory of oppression, a power, which is often mobilized for political aim. Thus Irwin-Zarecka is right: “remembrance has political aim” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 60). To better understand Irwin-Zarecka’s point one needs to assess the colonial experience in Rwanda. The colonial experience of oppression and subjugation felt by the Hutu ethnic group bound them and set them apart from the Tutsi who had a different colonial experience of being favoured by the Belgian colonial system. The victims of genocide would tend to be bonded by the horrifying experience they underwent.

**Case of Rwanda**

Rwanda presents us with a complex scenario of ethnicity. This is because since the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa share the same language and culture, Pancrace Twagiramutara (1998) and other scholars believe that the Rwandese belonged to the same ethnic group. For example, Twagiramutara (1998:108) says of pre-colonial Rwanda: the different groups of people over centuries of living together developed into one people with strong cultural unity. He goes on, “Indeed, the members of those social categories spoke the same language, Kinyarwanda, had the same manners, admired the same artistic and literary forms and developed an economy essentially geared to agriculture, livestock, pottery and nomadic hunting” (1998:108). Thus, on the basis of shared language and culture, and the possibility of social mobility

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2 A Hutu who acquired position wealth, property, prestige, influence and power could be assimilated into the Tutsi “ethnic” group, and conversely, a Tutsi who became poor could become a Hutu (109-10).
three groups together tends to ignore the difference between the Tutsi, the Hutu and the Twa.

With the politics of identity, the emphasis of ethnic identity is not cultural attributes like language, customs, and origins; but rather cultural and/or other markers such as shared memory or remembrance have political purpose as ethnic groups interact with other ethnic groups. Remembrance or the memory of oppression becomes an important ethnic marker when ethnic identities are politicised in order to further the interests and good of any such group that feels oppressed, marginalized or denied access to the political, social and economic goods of the state.

Ordinarily, remembrance would cement communal ties in a normal functioning community that upholds the ethics of human dignity, responsibility and authenticity. This is precisely because these ethical factors ensure that dissatisfaction does not occur in a community. The paper discusses these ethical factors in the next section. In this section, the paper attempts to show the ways in which remembrance of colonial oppression acted as a key orienting force in politicising the identity of the Hutu, and the postcolonial exclusion of the Tutsi led to Tutsi identity politics.

According to Aristotle, man is by nature a political animal. He has an inherent right to participate in the political life of his/her community. To be denied this right is to take away something substantially his by nature. In other words, to deny him/her that right is to, in a sense, harm his/her nature as a human person. But also, man achieves his/her well being in society—a society that enhances the realization of his/her needs and welfare. In African thought, according to Gyekye (1996), personhood is defined in terms of moral achievement, which “stresses sensitivity to the interest and well-being of other members of the community, though not necessarily to the detriment of individual rights” (Gyekye, 1996:52). In these conceptions of the human person we at once see the importance of human dignity, responsibility and authenticity rooted in the fact that human beings constitute something that is not just material but something much more than that. It is precisely this ethics that was disregarded in Rwanda and other places in Africa, that made us to witness remembrance of oppression and marginalisation resulting in the 1959 revolution, the narrow and exclusive policies of the post independent government, and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

As a consequence of the disregard for ethics, colonialism in Rwanda and in other parts of
Africa took an influential stand towards the human person. It saw persons as a means to an end—for achieving political and economic gain, rather than as individuals with human dignity. In Rwanda, for example, colonialism reorganised traditional institutions and thus introduced forced labour to supply their metropolis with coffee, and those who refused to comply this policy of forced labour were beaten and abused. In view of this, colonial power classified the Rwandan population into three races because of the colonial preoccupation with race theory. Similarly, because the colonial power believed that migration was important for spreading civilization, especially statecraft in Africa, intellectuals preoccupied themselves with the search for the origins of the groups in Rwanda (Mamdani, 2002: 42). It was presumed that the complex administrative system of the Rwandan state was brought from elsewhere; thus was born the Hamitic theory, which explained that the Tutsi were a superior race, and the Hutu, were indigenous, less superior and classified as Bantu.

More damaging to the dignity of the Hutu and the Twa was the colonial definition of the Hutu and Twa identities. For example, Mgr. Le Roy writes of the Tutsi and the Hutu:

The [Tutsi] differ absolutely by the beauty of their features and their light colour from the Bantu agriculturalists of an inferior type. Tall and well proportioned, they have long thin noses, a wide brow and fine lips. They say they come from the North. Their intelligent and delicate appearance, their love of money, their capacity to adapt to any situation seem to indicate a semitic-origin (Prunier, 1995 quotes Le Roy 7-8).

The creation and reinforcement of the Tutsi, Hutu and the Twa identities served a functional role in the colonial community: indirect rule, because of the few number of German colonial administrators in Rwanda. But the implications of the demeaning identities of an inferior Hutu and Twa and a superior Tutsi were translated into the colonial policies with their durable effect on the population of Rwanda, and on the Europeans. These stereotypes inflated the ego of the Tutsi and injured the identity of the Hutu. Colonialism created these identities oblivious of the fact that “our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (Tarlo, 1994:25).
The colonial privilege of the Tutsi over and against the Hutu and Twa is another case in point whereby the colonialist took an instrumental stand towards the people of Rwanda. In the educational sector for example, the missionary’s educational priority was the Tutsi. Father Leon Classe writes of their educational policy, “The objective was to turn the Tutsi, the ‘born ruler’ of Rwanda, into elite ‘capable of understanding and implementing progress,’ and thus functioning as auxiliaries to both the missionaries and the colonial administration” (Mamdani, 2002:89). Here the concern for giving priority to Tutsi education was for service to both the missionaries and the administration. Certainly, there were schools mainly for Hutu children, but this education was to prepare them for manual labour.

The colonial reformation of ubureetwa, that is, public interest work for the common good of the society was very exploitative, with the Hutu exploited and the Tutsi privileged. It was not only the function of ubureetwa that was transformed; it was also introduced to areas that had not practiced it in pre-colonial times. Initially, public interest work was a whole lineage’s obligation but after the Belgian colonial reform, it became an individual responsibility: every male, even female and children when needed, had to perform the forced labour. Since the Hutus were at the receiving end of colonial policies, they did most of the forced labour. Thus the Hutu were reduced to servitude. More so, with the support of the Belgians, the Tutsi gradually modified traditional land and contractual rights in their favour. The administration saw the land as vacant and considered the land its property, and therefore reclaimed the land without due compensation. This was how Tutsi chiefs, under the pretence of state necessity, gained control of traditional Hutu landholdings (ubukonde) in the northwest and southwest (Prunier, 1995:28). This is not to say that pre-colonial Rwanda was a perfect state where humanitarian ethics was flawlessly practiced. The interplay of power among the three groups in pre-colonial Rwanda, mostly between Tutsi and Hutu, proves otherwise.

The colonial environment did not create a community of responsibility where individual rights were respected, and hence, the good and needs of citizens realized. It rather created a community where each member of the community had to struggle for their survival. The colonial experience of victimization was traumatic for the memory, thus serving as a fulcrum for Hutu groups, the organisation of politics along ethnic lines, and the 1959 Hutu

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3 Not all Tutsi benefited directly from colonialism, there were those Petits Tutsi who were far from the centre of power.

4 In the 1950s, literatures from Hutu intellectuals began to appear that referred to the Tutsi as foreigners and
The Hutu revolution of 1959 brought a political change in Rwanda. Through violence that led to a high death toll among the Tutsi, this revolution reversed the Tutsi monopoly of political power. According to Catherine Newbury, the revolution, “ultimately, an appeal to Hutu solidarity became, for Hutu leaders, the most effect rallying point for revolutionary activity” (quoted in Mamdani, 2002:104). The revolution is significant in Rwandan history not only because it changed the nature of power in Rwanda, but also because it did not change, but rather reinforced, the political identities created by colonialism. Thus, the 1959 revolution created a divide between Hutu and Tutsi, as has never been known before, in Rwandan history.

Not only did the 1959 Hutu revolution harden the divide between Hutu and Tutsi, it also created a new version of the ideological construction of European anthropologists and missionaries. The new version served as a tool for the new elite to rule both the Hutu peasants and the Tutsi community. The Post–colonial regime turned it to its advantage: “the Tutsi were still ‘foreign invaders who had come from afar, but now this meant that they could not really be considered as citizens…. The Hutu had been the ‘native peasants’, enslaved by the aristocratic invaders: they were now the only legitimate inhabitants of the country” (Prunier, 1995:80). Mahmood Mamdani (2002"135) brings out the implication of the reversal of the ideological construct: “as a race, the Tutsi were not a political minority; they were politically foreign, as it were, resident aliens. Only the indigenous—ethnic groups—could rightly belong, fully, to both civil and political society”. Since the Tutsi were considered non-indigenous, they were treated as civil beings, with limitations. That is, they were discriminated against depending on the circumstances; but, and importantly, they were not treated as political beings, thus infringing on this right due them by nature. They could aspire to rights within civil society, but not in political society.

The denial of the political rights to the Tutsi in the postcolonial time led to a sharp split between Hutu and Tutsi political leaders. Hutu leaders “called for Hutu power for the exclusion of the Tutsi from political power, the Tutsi political elite moved into exile and began preparation for an armed return to power” (Mamdani, 2002:126). The Tutsi elite was divided between the accommodationist and the restorationist. The accomodationists accepted the 1959 revolution, and hoped for a peaceful internal political and constitutional process challenged Tutsi privileges. In response, the Tutsi claimed that the Tutsi and Hutu had over the centuries become one people, and that the only difference between them was occupational.
within which they could work out their future. These people wanted to return to Rwanda and participate in a coalition government. The restorationists wanted the original Tutsi power restored, and thus prepared for an armed invasion from exile. The Hutu position shifted from accommodation to exclusion of the Tutsi in the social and political life of the state. These policies of exclusion will characterize the post-independence polity and will manifest themselves as the Tutsi were given nine percent according to the quota policy. In the civil service (Tutsi nine percent according to the quota policy) also, during Juvenal Habyarimana’s regime, there was only one Tutsi official, two Tutsi parliamentarians out of seventy, and one Tutsi Minister out of a cabinet of twenty-five to thirty people.

Furthermore, the Hutu Ten Commandments published in the Kanguru newspaper owned by the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic on December 1990 serves as an illustration of Hutu identity politics masterminded by extremist Hutu elites. The commandments called for Hutus to be suspicious of the Tutsi and exclude the Tutsi in strategic social, political and economic offices of the State (Twagiramutara, 1998:119-120). Pancrace Twagiramutara (1998:120) says that the Ten Commandments were to be followed in national policies and inter-ethnic relations. Prejudices and stereotypes of this sort aimed at political, social and economic exclusion of the Tutsi because of the selfish bid for power by Hutu elites, and this partly led to the horrendous consequences of the 1994 Genocide. As a result of the politicisation of ethnicity, fear and mutual suspicion persisted among the members of the Hutu and Tutsi groups. This fear and mutual suspicion had a spill over effect on the Rwandan refugees most of whom refused to return to Rwanda because, for them, they did not have a home to return to.

Here we recognized that remembrance with its political aim was used as a rallying point for furthering and maintaining the Hutu interest. Also, we observe that the post-independence leaders were unable to transcend the differences of the colonial time and so were unable to build a community of responsibility where human rights and the ethics of authenticity were upheld.

In the preceding sections I argued that the horrendous consequence of the 1959 and 1994 conflicts in Rwanda resulted because of the practice of politics without ethics. The political decisions were weighed on the basis of cost-benefit calculation whether human beings were involved or not. Thus, instead of being concerned about the interest of the citizens and
creating a community where rights and differences were respected, they pursued their own misguided interests. This selfishness led to the egocentric bid to remain unduly in office, and also fuelled the oppression and marginalisation of people. I now turn to Plato and Aristotle for fair conceptions of politics.

**Ethical Consideration in Politics Matters**

We have seen how political practice without regard or concern for human persons has wrought devastating consequences in Rwanda. In what follows, this paper discusses Plato and Aristotle’s politics with the view to stressing three vital points. The first is the importance of transcending divisive factors in the state (such as ethnic loyalty) in order to build a healthy community. The second is that politics should be pursued with the interest of the citizens at heart by virtue of their dignity as human persons, while the third is that active political participation should be encouraged because of the political nature of man. By right human beings are not to be excluded from political participation, for this participation is an inherent right; excluding them from this right is denying them that which is inherently theirs.

Political unity—the unity of the city—was very important for the Greeks. In order to create a sense of national unity, the Greeks were able to transcend some divisive factors, which survived primitive times. These included family loyalty, tribal and clannish loyalties, and the bitterness of the poor towards the rich. Hence, the nature of democracy practised before the Peloponnesian war in Athens encouraged active political participation in the state, and instilled a sense of belonging to the state among the citizens. The importance of the state for an Athenian cannot be overemphasized as “it was an active force molding his whole life” (Jones, 1980:54).

It was against the moral and political decadence in the attitude of the Athenians, a consequence of the Peloponnesian war, that Plato delineated the ideal city. For Plato, man is by nature a social animal, and because of this, he associates with others in the community (Jones, 1980:175). Politics, for Plato, deals with the arrangement of the state and the question of who should govern the state for the best interest of the citizens. Using the analogy of a physician whose aim is to study his patient’s interest, not his own, Plato shows that the

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5 Unfortunately, slaves and women were excluded from political participation. Aristotle even justified slavery, that men are naturally not equal. This view, though wrong, and unaccepted today, was a commonly accepted view during Aristotle’s time.
function of any government is to promote the good of those governed (Plato, 1961:23-24). The aim of political life in the city-state, for Plato, then, is for the interest and good of the citizens and not for the interest of the rulers. The good of man, for the Greeks, and certainly for Plato, is attainable only in the state and through the activities of the state. The good life includes true knowledge that is knowledge of the forms. Plato goes on: man achieves the highest good, thus happiness, when he nurtures his rational and moral being, and properly cultivates his soul and maintains harmoniously the well being of life.

For Plato, moral rightness is an important virtue for the rulers of his ideal city. This is because it will enhance the good of those governed and also the life of virtue lived by both its ruler and citizens. However one cannot perform morally right action if he does not have knowledge of what is morally right or virtuous. This calls for the importance of knowing what is morally right. In view of this, Plato proposes that virtue be taught to those who are to rule in the city. Suffice it to say that in the Meno, Plato identifies virtue with knowledge, and concludes that virtue, thus construed, can be taught. Importantly, power should be given to those capable of ruling, that is, those who know what is morally right. This is why, in thinking that philosophers have knowledge of the forms, or the essential nature of things, Plato proposes that the power to govern the state should be entrusted to the philosophers. In the republic, it is only the philosopher who has true knowledge of the good for man, hence, the need for the philosopher king.

Aristotle also celebrates the importance of the community. He says every community is established for the purpose of some good. More so, human actions are aimed towards that which human beings think is the good. The state comes into being because of the needs of life, and it is maintained because it helps its citizens achieve the good life. According to Aristotle, man is by nature a political animal. This means that man is a social being who achieves his/her good only by actively participating in the political life of the society.

People want to be treated politically equal and they resent being marginalized. When people are oppressed and exploited in a state, political revolution is likely to occur. The main cause of revolutionary feeling in the state, according to Aristotle, is a desire for equality. This occurs when people feel that they are not equal to other citizens who have more than they do. Also, revolution may occur when a people feel that they are superior to others whom they think are more privileged than they are by the system. According to Aristotle, “inferiors
revolt in order that they may be equal, and equals that they may be superior” (Jones, 1980: 303). The second cause of dissension in a state, according to Aristotle, is the desire to get honour or the fear of dishonour and loss.

Having seen the terrible consequences of politics devoid of ethics, which are manifested in the politics of identity in Rwanda, the question is how to reconcile and build a community that respects the ethnic aspirations of the Twa, Hutu and the Tutsi. And having seen that politics rightly construed considers the interests and dignity of those governed, I argue that the politics imbued with the ethics of responsibility, human dignity and authenticity can help towards building a friendly community in Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide of 1994.

**Ethics of Responsibility, Human dignity and Authenticity**

In connection with the above, there is the need not only for rulers to be concerned with the interest of citizens but also for each member of a community to show concern for the needs and interests of others in community. Kwame Gyekye (1996:63) terms this concern for the need of others in a community “the ethics of responsibility”, which is fashioned by the necessity of social life. Responsibility here means “a caring attitude or conduct that one feels one ought to adopt with respect to the well-being of another person or other person (Gyekye, 1996:63). The ethic of responsibility includes helping others in distress, showing concern for the need and welfare of others and refraining from harming others, and so on. One’s concern for others’ interests does not necessarily mean a neglect of one’s need. The ethics of responsibility “does not in any way set itself against the pursuit of one’s responsibility to others” (1996: 64). The ethics of responsibility prescribed by social morality, according to (Gyekye, 1996:70), is a twofold moral responsibility, which is considered to be the supreme moral principle-the highest good. When this ethics is successfully lived, it is an ideal for the satisfactory functioning of every human community.

But why are we concerned with the ethics of responsibility? It is precisely because, as humans, we are by nature social beings, and need a healthy functioning community in order to fulfil our communal as well as individual needs. We need a community that enhances the good and interest of each member of society. This kind of community cannot be realized in Rwanda, if both the leaders and members of the community pursue their personal interests. Both the leaders and citizens of Rwanda ought to show concern for human welfare and the interest of members of the Rwandan community. This calls for recognition of the value of
humanity, which is linked to the unity of individual members of the Rwandan community. In respecting the individuals and pursuing the interest of members of the state, we show respect for the real value of the human beings, and thus oppose the notion that human beings are mere properties for political advancement or helpless lambs to be sacrificed on the table of egocentric political gimmicks.

On the other hand, the ethics of authenticity is the idea that an individual or a people should be true to themselves or their culture precisely because human beings are capable of hearing a voice from within, and should be true to that voice. Drawing from Rousseau and Herder, and from Lionel Trilling’s usage of the word in his book *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Taylor (1994) notes that because of the dignity that inheres in human beings, and because a vital feature of human life is fundamentally its dialogical character, individuals are called upon to be true to themselves, that is their originality. This is because it is only the individual that can articulate and discover, and in so doing, define himself/herself. Similarly, cultural groups are called to be true to themselves and their cultures, while simultaneously not being regarded as second-class members of the society (Taylor, 1994:31). In the same vein, these groups should not look down on other groups in the society as second-class members.

**The Politics of Recognition in Rwanda**

This paper recognizes that the politics of ethnic identities in Rwanda is a complex case, and does not pretend that the politics of recognition that it proposes holds the answer to the crisis in the Rwandan state. Rather, this paper questions whether this politics with its inherent ethics of authenticity can contribute towards ensuring lasting peace, unity and the respect for human dignity in culturally diverse Rwanda.

One point that came to the fore in the preceding discussion is that the post independence leaders in Rwanda rallied around their ethnic identities to gain political support from members of their ethnic group. This appeal to ethno-nationalism finds resonance with ordinary people because of their common experience of unfair distribution of colonial resources, and economic, social and political welfare. Unevenly distributed also was the burden of the state by government authorities. This injustice led to the political, social and economic marginalisation and exploitation of the Hutu during colonial times, and the marginalisation of the Tutsi during the postcolonial times. This is because the state, it seems, did not recognize the aspiration, and thus guarantee the prosperity, of these groups. It is for
these reasons therefore, that ethno-nationalism, with its emotional potentiality, instilled
mutual suspicion and fear in, as well as fostered the political, economic and social exclusion
of, the members of these ethnic groups at one time or the other in Rwanda.

Writing from his Canadian experience and arguing for the recognition of different identities,
Taylor says that the demand for recognition is necessary in today's politics because there is a
supposed connection between recognition and identity. Identity, as this paper understands it,
is “a person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as
a human being” (Taylor, 1994: 25). The notion of the self is always created where there is the
other. Charles Taylor puts it better, “human identity is created…dialogically, in response to
our relations, including our actual dialogues, with others” (1994: 7). This means that
identities are never monologically constituted. An individual or a group does not work their
identity in isolation from other people. Thus, there is the need for a community that enables
the realization of the individual’s goals, hopes and potentials. The very word identity already
presupposes exclusion because group identity marks one people from the others. Taylor says,
“we define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our
significant others want to see in us” (1994:33). Thus in a political environment where the
significant others purport to, or actually, make decisions for the other groups, and are
involved in a politics of domination, oppression and subordination because of their superior
power, some people may form and/or politicise their identities as a way of reacting against
the hostile situation they face. Thus a common consciousness is formed by this shared
experience, which ties these people.

In part, identity, according to Taylor’s (1994) understanding, is affected by recognition or its
absence, often by the misrecognition of others. For these reasons, a person or group of people
can suffer real damage or real distortion if the people or society around them reflects to them
a confining, demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves (Taylor, 1994: 25). Hence he
calls for the politics of recognition with its two-dimensional politics: the politics of equal
dignity and the politics of difference.

Here, the politics of equal dignity emphasises the dignity of all citizens based on the
unquestionable worth of the human person, and thus this politics demands that the rights and
entitlement of all citizens be equalized. This entails that all citizens of Rwanda should have,
in the words of Taylor (2004), “an identical basket of rights and immunities”. This will mean
the abolition of “first-class” and “second-class” citizens. The politics of equal dignity is based on the idea that all human beings are worthy of respect because they are rational agents able to direct their lives through principle (Taylor, 1994: 41). I suggest that a culture of human rights should be cultivated in Rwanda. This will involve a deliberate effort in upholding the dignity of men and women. This invariably requires that actions that constrain or violate the dignity of human persons should be avoided. For example, Tutsi, Hutu and Twa should have the right to vote and be voted for, and all should have equal opportunities, freedom of speech, freedom of association and so on. Human rights go beyond freedom from interference to benefits and entitlement to education, health care, food and decent living standard. In this case, human rights are a basic human need.

The politics of difference, conversely, demands that recognition be given to the unique identity of individuals or groups, and that their distinctness from everyone else be recognized. For Taylor (1994:38), “it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity”. Ignoring the distinctness of minority groups or failure to recognize their identity constitute an offence against the ideal of authenticity. Thus, the politics of difference demands that acknowledgement be given to that which is not commonly shared by all people: culture, tradition, community of shared memory, ethnicity etc. Therefore, it condemns the discrimination of citizens, and demands that no one or a group be relegated to subservient positions in the society. The politics of difference urges the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa to take their differences seriously. Even though the three groups in Rwanda share the same language and culture, the class difference in pre-colonial and colonial times widened the rift between the three ethnic groups. There is a different consciousness in operation as a result of the policies of Belgian colonialism, politics of exclusion practiced by the post-colonial Hutu leaders, and the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi ethnic group. These politicised memories led to the formation of different communities of memories in Rwanda. This paper proposes the cultivation of a kind of national politics in Rwanda that gives consideration not only to the ethnic aspirations of the Tutsi, Hutu and the Twa ethnic groups, but which also acknowledges the ways in which the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa are similar yet recognizing the differences in these three groups. This is necessary because the communal good in a society that constitutes people of different group aspirations and goals will conflict with what others hold as their personal or tribe-centred goods. Failure to recognise and respect the difference in the groups will hinder any healing that may have been initiated.
Addressing the fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations, John Paul observes:

“the fear of “difference”, especially when it expresses itself in a narrow and exclusive nationalism which denies any rights to “the other”, can lead to a true nightmare of violence and terror. And yet if we make the effort to look at the matter objectively, we can see that, transcending all the differences which distinguish individuals and peoples, there is a fundamental commonality” (“Address to United Nations” 1995).

Conclusion

Pope John Paul rightly recognizes that beyond our differences: ethnic, racial, and so on; there is something fundamental that unites us as human beings. It is only with national reconciliation in mind that policies to promote the policies of equal dignity and difference will be effective. This means that leaders should initiate a programme of national reconciliation that could take the form of admission of its own faults and the faults of the past governments. Once this is done, just laws could be promulgated, that is, laws that promote respect for the dignity and difference of the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. This entails that all citizens should be equal politically, and that positions in society should be distributed on the basis of merit and not on ethnic affiliation. In this vein, laws that discriminate against any ethnic group in schools, government, and in workplaces should be revisited.

The awareness of the fact of difference or the reality of the other is important especially as the post genocide governments are suspicious of any talk of the difference between the Hutu and the Tutsi, and see such talk as intending to breed genocide. The government should not gloss over the difference of the Tutsi, Hutu, and the Twa by only insisting on their sameness, whilst denying the differences. Also, there is the fear of introducing oneself as a Hutu. This is because of the fear of being associated with the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide, and the wrath this incurs.

Thus, there is the need to cultivate an environment where everyone is unafraid to own up to his identity whether Hutu, Tutsi or Twa. Reconciliation will be facilitated when the political behaviour of the government or its officials is such that it does not create a feeling of estrangement in any of the groups in Rwanda. Political leaders need to create an environment
where all citizens—Twa, Hutu and Tutsi—can fearlessly and productively participate in the political, economic and social life of the state. No one should be denied his or her right to participate in politics on the basis of the person’s cultural identity. When a culture that respects the political rights of citizens is cultivated, it would help liberate the creative energies and talents of citizens, and these will in turn boost development in society.

In this paper, a distinction is made between ethnicity and politicised ethnic identity in Rwanda. In order to understand politicised ethnic identities, The paper followed Iwona Irwin Zarecka in noting that experience of victimization binds people in ways only marked by kinship ties. Thus a common consciousness is developed that demarcates ethnic groups. Lastly, The paper suggests that there is the need to practice the politics of recognition in Rwanda for peace and reconciliation to be achieved.

Bibliography


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