

Reflections on Societal Reading: The Case of Rwanda

by

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The development of life-long reading interests and reading habits is a constant process which begins in the home, improves systematically in the school and is carried on in later life through the influences of the general cultural atmosphere and the conscious efforts of public education and public libraries (Bamberger 1975: 43).

Abstract

This presentation addresses the public felt problem regarding the lack of a reading culture in Rwanda. The government, academic authorities and the media often speak out of the lack of a reading culture and low levels of literacy among the Rwandan population in general that slows down the implementation of public policies and academic excellence. In Rwanda, like in many other African societies, there is a predominance of oral communication in people's daily interactions, which makes people depend and rely on oral sources for their information and communication. Hence, it is common to hear people saying that our reading culture is poor or simply inexistent. And yet, it is assumed that in the twenty-first century, reading and writing traditions are integral to living a successful life, and illiteracy is equated to failure to cope with the demands of life and prosper in modern times. In this regard, the overarching aim of this reflection is to increase the knowledge and awareness of Rwandans and Africans on the whole on the development of a reading culture and early literacy. Moreover, the use of this paper is to promote a reading culture and literacy in Rwanda by engaging the whole nation in a national effort to build a sustainable culture of reading.

Keywords: Reading society, Rwanda, reading culture, early literacy.

Background and Context

This reflection addresses the publicly felt problem of a lack of a reading culture in Rwanda (Baleeta, 2005; Parry, 2005; Ndikubwayezu, 2009; Ruterana, 2012). Rwanda is located a few degrees south of the Equator, bordered by Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to a Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2013) report, the literacy rate among the Rwandan population aged between 15 and 24 years old was 83.7%, and the literacy rate among people aged 15 and above was 69.7%. This means that the remaining (16.3% and 30.3% respectively) were illiterate in the year 2010. The presentation thus explores home literacy practices which pave the way for lifelong learning through the development of reading habits. It is based on four studies, with different perspectives that converge to the ways of developing a reading culture and how literacy events can reflect societal issues. The study also investigated the experiences of literacy practices among tertiary and primary students, reflections of stakeholders on how to cater for emergent literacy, and reading culture in Rwanda. In addition, this was inspired by the sociocultural perspective of literacy development (Vygotsky, 1978; Street, 1993, 1996; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Barton, 2001; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001) as well as an emergent literacy perspective (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

Government authorities and the media in Rwanda often speak about the lack of a reading culture and low levels of literacy among the Rwandan population slow down the implementation of public policies (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning [MINECOFIN], 2007). Yet, the benefits of a reading culture are numerous, and should be acknowledged, as highlighted in one of Minister Habineza's keynote addresses wherein he noted:

The reading culture is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning. Becoming a skilled and adaptable reader enhances the chances of success at school and beyond. Reading is not just for school, it is for life. Reading, in all its variety, is vital to our becoming better informed, having a better understanding of ourselves and others, and to our development as thoughtful, constructive contributors to a democratic and cohesive society (as cited in Ndikubwayezu, 2009: 11).

Here Habineza emphasized that most Rwandans do not find interest in reading because they are not aware of the advantages associated with it. It is therefore the responsibility of those who are enlightened (authorities, teachers, researchers, parents and others) to showcase the value of reading and pass it on to the younger generation in order to give them a chance to be the best they can be in life. This does, however, not demean the long and rich oral tradition that was a vehicle for oral literacy before the coming of print literacy, but instead offers a complementary addition.

The overall assumption of this presentation is that reading above and beyond the basic search for information is a lifelong educational activity of capital importance for the entire population. And in this context, the promotion of the reading habit has been on UNESCO's agenda since 1972 with the proclamation of the *International Book Year* with one of the themes of the year to promote reading habits (Bamberger, 1975). This promotion of the reading agenda was thus retained because it was believed that many people's literacy acquired in or outside school could be lost simply because 'reading is not a part of their cultural environment, and books attuned to their tastes are not easily accessible' (Idem, p. 38). To perpetuate this UNESCO has devoted the date of April 23 every year as World Book Day, and the theme for 2011 was retained: "paying a world-wide tribute to books and authors, encouraging everyone, and in particular young people, to discover the pleasure of reading."

Indeed, research in reading claims that reading is an important part of modern education (Mialaret, 1975; Töttemeyer, 1994; Rosenberg, 2003). And in a profound way, reading is essential for people to increase their knowledge and awareness of other cultures and ways of thinking. In his treaty on learning to read, Mialaret (1975) remarks that extensive reading, i.e., reading above and beyond basic or functional reading, fosters the reader's personal, moral and intellectual growth; it is a source of inspiration and entertainment, and it gives us insight into ourselves and others. He also emphasized that these benefits can only accumulate maximally if readers choose to read during their leisure time, and if reading becomes a lifelong habit. Additionally, philosopher James Russel Lowel (quoted by Robinson & Good, 1987) in his *Democracy and Other Addresses: Books and Libraries* (1893) describe the value of extensive reading as follows,

That is the key which admits us to the whole world of thought and fancy and imagination; to the company of saint and sage, of the wisest and wittiest moment that enables us to see with the keenest eye, hear with the finest ears, and listen to the sweetest voices of all times (Robinson & Good, 1987: iv).

From both Mialaret and Russel Lowel, I deduce that making a nation a reading one is equipping it with the most reliable tool for enhancing literacy levels and a way to ensue advantages. Thanks to reading, we have an inexhaustible source of knowledge and information. Thus, it is the most effective way to learn more throughout human life, and consequently, the evolution, multiplicity and diversity of human knowledge requires everyone to continually read for the acquisition of more knowledge. This reasoning is in line with Dénoyer (1980) who holds that the education of men and women continues into adolescence and adulthood through reading. Moreover, Mialaret (1975) suggests that reading is a faithful friend, a true friend that does not betray. Hence, he believes that anybody who likes reading is a saved person – saved from ignorance, boredom and loneliness.

However, in several literate societies there is an increasing number of aliterates, i.e., people who are able to read but choose not to (Beers, 1996). In this respect, my contribution towards building a literate and reading society is to raise Rwandans' awareness of their essential role in laying strong foundations for literacy among children and lifelong reading habits in the population.

In Rwanda, like in many other African societies, there is a predominance of oral communication in people's daily interactions, which makes people depend and rely on oral sources for their information and communication (Dike, 1995; Kwikiriza, 2000; Parry, 2000; Rosenberg, 2003; Commeyras & Mazile, 2011). Hence, it is common to hear people saying that reading culture in Africa is poor or simply inexistent. Juxtaposing this situation, Commeyras and Mazile (2011) in their study on the culture of reading among primary school teachers in Botswana emphasized that the rich oral traditions in many African nations seem to eclipse the print culture. Indeed, before the colonisation of Africa, the oral tradition was Africa's initial form of literacy wherein people's wisdom, norms, values and language were basically transmitted by word of mouth, and thus, traditional practices were learned by the young as they observed what their elders were doing or saying. And usually, there was story telling in the evening around the fireplace where there were riddles, tongue twisters, metaphors being conveyed as well as idiomatic expressions to deliver messages of wisdom through songs and dances to fashion good behaviour in the young and in helping them to grow wisely as useful members of the community. Hence, cautiously, adults taught children tales, traditional songs, riddles, tongue twisters, nursery rhymes, myths, legends and proverbs in a bid to give them a full understanding of their cultural heritage (Rugamba, 1981).

This oral tradition in most Rwandan households where family members would tell tales usually in the evenings before going to bed is documented by the Reverend Father Hurel (1922: 2), he writes:

Tout le monde, jeunes et vieux connaissent sur le bout de doigt la plupart de contes, et cependant personne ne s'en lasse. On les écoute toujours avec le même enthousiasme. Nous en avons maintes et maintes fois fait l'expérience nous-mêmes, soit à l'école avec des enfants ou des jeunes gens, soit dans d'autres réunions composées exclusivement d'hommes pris au hasard dans la masse. La plupart prêchent une morale qui ne ferait pas mauvaise figure dans nos pays civilisés et chrétiens. La vanité, la suffisance, la gourmandise, la lâcheté, la paresse, l'infidélité, etc. y sont flétries avec un à-propos du meilleur goût.

[Everybody, young and elderly people, have most of the tales at their fingertips and nobody seems to weary of them. They always listen to them with the same enthusiasm. We have at several times done the experiment, either with schoolchildren and young pupils, or with exclusively groups of men taken at random in the crowd. Most of these tales convey a moral lesson that would put up a good show in our civilized and Christian countries. Vanity, self-importance, greed, cowardice, laziness, unfaithfulness, etc. are condemned with an aptness of the best taste (my translation)].

Oral tradition is important, however, it is assumed by some that reading and writing traditions are integral to living successfully, whereas illiteracy is equated with a failure to cope with the demands of life and prosper in modern times (Dénoyer, 1980; Kwikiriza, 2000; Parry, 2000; Minecofin, 2007; UNESCO, 2009). In this regard, in its visions through the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) and Rwanda Vision 2020, the government of Rwanda considers the lack of a reading culture and low levels of literacy among the Rwandan population in general as a very big challenge to human capital development (Minecofin, 2007). Hence, literacy development is eyed as a key factor that will facilitate an improvement in human resource development and an avenue to a knowledge-based economy. Here, logic dictates that literacy encourages divergent and rational thinking, thereby raising critical personal consciousness in the lives of individuals who apply it to improve their lives. Minecofin echoes this logic, stating,

A literate population is more likely to take charge of its own destiny and development and to participate in public life. A literate population is also more likely to achieve objectives such as linguistic and cultural development. [...] there is a positive correlation between literacy and the standard of living: that is to say, if a person is literate, that person is also likely to be richer (Minecofin, 2007: 21).

This same position is also held by Staiger and Cassey (1983: 8) in their guide for reading campaigns in developing countries. They write:

The benefits of literacy are not only of an economic nature but also can have a significant positive impact on the quality of intellectual and spiritual life of individuals, and help all segments of the population become true participants in the development of their countries. Perhaps through these efforts governments will come to recognize that the development of the reading habit is as essential to the well-being of the country as universal primary education and basic literacy programmes.

In a related development, a few decades later, UNESCO (2009) still had to emphasize that literacy is a prerequisite for the development of personal, social, economic and political empowerment, and therefore, an essential means of building people's capabilities to cope with the evolving challenges and complexities of life, culture, economy and society. And most paramount, that literacy is a catalyst for learning throughout life.

Conceptual Framework

This reflection is based on sociocultural and emergent literacy theories pertinent to the development of a reading culture and literacy. Indeed both perspectives address the critical importance of social, historical and cultural contexts for human cognitive development and social interactions with the support of cultural tools.

Hence, in a sociocultural perspective, literacy develops alongside people's historical, cultural and social contexts and takes different shapes depending on these contexts (Street, 1993, 1996; Barton, 2001; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001; Wagner, 2001). This perspective is rooted in Vygotskian theory that emphasizes the importance of social and cultural contexts in the human experience where learning takes place and how the context impacts on what is learnt (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, learning and development are embedded within social events and is occurring as a learner interacts with other people, objects, and activities in a collaborative environment. In the course of development, Vygotsky sees cultural tools as important means to mediate the social and cultural engagements of the learner. He therefore argues that when children participate in cultural and social activities with the guidance of more skilled partners, they internalize cultural tools which may be anything physical (books, pens, pencils, library, bookshops, materials, signs, etc.) or psychological (language). And thus, these cultural tools are hailed to facilitate the acquisition of higher mental functions acquired through a system of practices common to a specific culture and used independently by members of the society (Vygotsky, 1997).

Vygotsky (1997) further describes higher mental functions as deliberate, mediated, and internalized behaviours. He asserts that the higher functions of intellectual activity arise out of collective behaviour, cooperation with the surrounding people, and from social experience (Vygotsky, 1993). In this respect, it is held that early childhood education is the first step in a long process wherein young children are engaged in the acquisition of tools and in the development of higher mental functions developed through social interaction with people in the child's world. Next, according to Vygotsky, these interactions with the social environment, including peer interaction and scaffolding (support provided by an adult or peers for children learning how to carry out tasks they could not perform alone), are important ways to facilitate individual cognitive growth and knowledge acquisition. Vygotsky's (1978) perspectives on scaffolding suggest that learning first takes place on a social level before it takes place on an individual level.

And in relationship to scaffolding is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is characterised as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). This refers to both what the child can do with adults and peers as well as what he or she can do independently. Thus, Vygotsky maintains that development within the ZPD depends upon social interaction and the range of societal skills that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration which exceeds what the child can do alone.

Second in this exercise is a perspective that engages emergent literacy theory which suggests that literacy development begins before children start formal instruction in elementary school. It also suggests that literacy development is continuous and ongoing, and that parents have a powerful influence on children’s literacy development (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Reutzel and Cooter (2004) in unity posit that an emergent literacy perspective values the literacy experiences young children engage in at home and at school during their early years. Thus the knowledge of literacy develops as an individual listens and speaks, and eventually is exposed to print and are continuously developed over time. And furthermore, it is held that the minds of young children absorb information about language, literacy, and print concepts by interacting with the world both orally and through print, and as a result, parents and teachers can foster a child's emerging literacy development through the creation of oral and print-rich environments that provide access to spoken language through rhymes and riddles, songs, books, writing and drawing supplies, and literacy play materials. These tools obviously constitute important cultural conditions within the sociocultural theory perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) as they mediate children’s literacy experiences both at home and school. And finally, in this process of development, the social interaction between the adult and the child is important as the latter learns literacy through conversation and involvement in literacy practices.

Discussion

According to the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2009), illiteracy among the population from both urban and rural areas stood at 34.7 per cent in 2006. Hence, a sizeable number of the Rwandan population do not live in conditions conducive to the practice of reading. Yet, Vygotsky (1987) contends that children imitate, internalize, and even externalize all that they see, hear, and do with peers and other more competent members of their culture in their developmental processes. And according to Ruterana (2011, 2012), family and community literacy in Rwanda is predominantly oral while print literacy leaves a lot to be desired. Hence, the most common form of literacy practice in most homes and in the community at large that children are exposed to during their childhood days in Rwanda is storytelling.

In general, Rwandan families and communities are mostly involved in and depend on oral communication for their day-to-day information and interaction, and as a consequence, they agree that a culture of reading is not nurtured in Rwanda. This interestingly corroborates statements from various media, academic and political authorities who unanimously speak out about the lack of a reading culture among Rwandans in general. Taking Vygotsky's claim that children 'grow into the intellectual life of those around them' (1978: 88), it becomes particularly important to act on this issue now because all members of society are being asked to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 established from a blueprint agreed upon by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions via efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest.

Written Versus Oral Traditions

Ruterana (2011, 2012) offers insights into developing and enhancing print literacy and a reading culture which appear to be uncontroversial assets that should be disseminated and enhanced in order to succeed in education. Research on education in developing countries (Altbach, 1995; Dike, 1995; Brock-Utne, 2000; Torres, 2000; Brock-Utne, 2001; Brock-Utne, Zubeida & Qorro, 2004; Parry, 2005) holds that there is often a poor reading culture in most agrarian societies, arguably due to a lack of access to education, the language of the reading materials not being in a familiar language of the expected reader, and a lack of reading materials in general. Therefore, people mostly rely on verbal communication. This oral tradition is certainly a valuable aspect of functional literacy skills, but reading is an important part of modern education. Here, Ruterana (2011, 2012) argues that oral traditions should not be seen as an obstacle to a reading culture but as a potential resource relating to the experience and life of the people involved, and therefore, the richness of oral traditions could be successfully used to foster a reading culture if only the languages used in Rwanda were equally valued. Indeed, through the use of traditional oral materials in reading at home and school, the reading and writing cultures could can reinforce the oral tradition because the materials are familiar to the readers.

In the context of Rwanda, we can ask why the rich oral traditions of the nation are not in print in Kinyarwanda, the official language of Rwanda via the Rwanda-Burundi language spoken by more than twelve million people in Burundi and adjacent parts of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and southern Uganda. And ironically, why is the official language in the schools English (from colonial time until 2008, French was the language of use in the schools)? And most interestingly, most of the available books and papers in Rwanda are in French or English, and by far spoken and used more fluently by the minority, rather than by the majority.

Sociolinguistic Considerations

Historically, during the colonial era and post-independence period until 1994, French enjoyed high status in education in Rwanda at the expense of Kinyarwanda, while English was a subject taught only in secondary schools (Erny, 2005, 2002). Soon after the 1994 genocide, English was also given the same weight as French, still at the expense of Kinyarwanda. In 2008, the government of Rwanda declared that education at all levels should be conducted in English in a bid to equip the citizens with a language to cope with various demands of the East African Community and Commonwealth whose member states speak and use English. In this regard, since January 2009, English has become the sole language of instruction. This linguistic situation is likely to deprive Rwandan children of a good foundation in Kinyarwanda which is essential for them to build their understanding and develop literacy and a culture of reading. Indeed, according to UNESCO (1975), it is through one's mother tongue that every human being first learns to formulate and express their ideas about themselves and about the world they live in. The mother tongue plays an important role in moulding the child's early concepts, henceforth it is difficult to grasp new concepts alien to its cultural environment that cannot be readily found in its mother tongue.

Moreover, the language of instruction issue has placed a burden on teachers, children and parents. The blunt fact that neither the teachers nor the children are fluent in the language used in class has serious implications for literacy development. There is indeed plenty of evidence from countries around the world that children who have a solid foundation in their mother tongue learn other languages such as English much better than those who have to struggle as soon as they start school with an unfamiliar language (Yates, 1995; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2001; Brock-Utne, Zubeida & Qorro, 2004).

Research in literacy studies has shown that mother tongue literacy should be established first since children at an earlier age grasp the concepts taught to them better in their mother tongue (Altbach, 1995; Dike, 1995; Barton, 2001; UNESCO, 2011). The best entry into literacy is a child's native language (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). In addition, Cummins (2000) claims that literacy in a child's native language establishes a knowledge, concept and skills base that transfers from native language reading to reading in a second language. The ensuing consequence is that when children go to school and encounter a new environment like learning in a language they are not used to, they obviously experience shock. Hence, research acknowledges that literacy teaching in a language already known to the learners, especially their mother tongue, is more likely to succeed than teaching in a language children use for the first time when they enter school. Similarly, children get more motivated and interested in reading if the books they read reflect their culture, language and values (Williams, 2006).

There is also a problem of disproportionate supplies of reading materials and resources among languages used in Rwanda. In general, there are less newspapers, books, magazines, and other reading materials written in Kinyarwanda compared to foreign languages that are sold on the Rwandan market (Ruterana, 2012). Very little has been and is being produced in Kinyarwanda, the mother tongue and national language of Rwanda's population. The vast majority of books and reading materials are available in French and English, languages that are spoken and understood by a minority of the population. We are faced with a situation of a language policy that devalues the status of Kinyarwanda in literacy education while promoting the value of English (today) and French (during the last century). As a consequence, if there are almost only reading materials available in English and French on the book market which are by far culturally irrelevant, it becomes much more difficult for many Rwandans to develop a reading culture and retain literacy.

There is also an urban and rural divide towards literacy and reading culture development among the parents and children in Rwanda. This divide is explained by the fact that people from the urban, by far well-off groups, have more access and resources than the rural and poor groups with little means! Indeed, daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers in Kinyarwanda rarely reach readers who live in the rural areas, representing 84% of the population. If they reach them, it is usually several days later when they are no longer current. Hence, I would argue that the availability of reading materials in a language read, used and understood by the rural masses would be a viable instrument for sustaining literacy and creating a reading culture. In addition, poverty in many households (both urban and rural) does not allow easy access to books, newspapers or any other reading materials. This is coupled with the lack of electricity in the countryside

Conversely, the question of language literacy and a reading culture should be a crosscutting issue across all studies, because it is the basic and most fundamental factor determining the creation and development of literacy, and a reading culture. Therefore, I argue that the native language that seems to be kept marginal, as it appears to be outside the official reading and writing culture would most likely be best in providing assistance to children as they journey into the children's zone of proximal development. In short, the present language policy that only promotes reading and writing in foreign languages at school seems to hamper the development of a reading culture in Rwanda.

Moreover, at the socio-cultural level, there might be a conflict between the oral and reading/writing traditions. The reality is that books are not well integrated into the Rwandan society because it is firmly steeped in the oral tradition. It is also customary for Rwandans not to bear silence in their daily activities, while reading is a form of intimate and solitary communication between the text and the reader. And in contrast, the oral culture is considered as a socializing agent while reading is positioned as a private and solitary activity. Plus, in general, Rwandans like to tease one another, tell stories, and jokes to enliven their soul which can often discourage private and solitary activity (Kagame, 1969, 1978).

Creating a Reading Society

The persistent lack of a reading culture has been reported in many developing countries whereas being part of it is reported to go hand in hand with success in school and overall national development. This reflection therefore adds to the existing literature and knowledge on the lack of a reading culture in other African nations, notably Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Malawi and Botswana (Rosenberg, 2003; Magara & Batambuze, 2005; Kachala, 2007; Kelechi, 2010; Commeyras & Mazile, 2011). Hence, they concur that a reading culture becomes well established in a society that values and has interest in books and reading.

For the case of Rwanda, Ruterana (2012) argues that many people did not find interest in reading because they are not aware of its advantages and the value associated with it. Thus, from a socio-educational background rooted in colonial and post-colonial education, the schools in Rwanda, reading has been equated with a memory exercise to pass school examinations, not as a lifelong learning activity. This has culminated into a lack of interest in reading and books, less value given to reading or books as well as a lack of motivation in reading beyond the context of school. Yet, very frequently there is negative discussion about the less literate wherein people refer to them as '*inkandagirabitabo*' (the one who walks over books or book trader).

Perplexing is also the presence of people who are unmotivated, uncommitted and reluctant readers who lack enthusiasm for reading and always have reasons why they do not read (Beers, 1996). Yet, in her '*what no bedtime story means: narrative skills at home and school*', Heath (1986) holds that mainstream parents link school success for their children to "learning to love books, learning what books can do for you, and learning to entertain yourself and to work independently" (p.101).

Literacy practices including reading to, singing for, and telling stories to children, access to books and printed materials, etc. are credited to nurture and stimulate children's love for books and reading from infancy. And moreover, Heath (1983), Cochran-Smith (1984), and others claim that the single most important activity for building a foundation for reading is reading aloud to children. Thus, according to Teale and Sulzby (1986), these literacy practices also constitute literate behaviours that are essential parts of the language development process. For this matter, children need to access books and role models who read and tell stories to them from infancy. In addition, in the light of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1997, 1978), cultural tools like languages, reading and writing materials, oral materials, and institutions like libraries and bookshops are important conditions for mediating and enhancing the acquisition of literacy and a culture of reading, thus making Rwanda a reading society.

Conclusion

To conclude, as earlier said, from the new literacies perspective, literacy is understood in terms of how people actively and creatively apply literate skills to suit their own purposes and needs (Street, 1993) including knowledge, pleasure, entertainment, and problem solving. These social uses of literacy give an opportunity to read critically. But what does it take to become a critical reader and what does he or she work to develop? First, a critical reader develops critical consciousness and thus it empowers him or her to become actively engaged in identifying their problems, asking questions, analysing, and developing strategies for transformation. Hence, a person that wants to become a critical reader should become actively engaged in reading and action focused thinking about self and society. According to Freire and Macedo (1987), during the process of developing a critical consciousness, the learner can also identify, interpret, criticise, and finally transform the world and read the world by reading the word. And yes, the ideal approach, if people want to develop a reading habit is for them to do it with enthusiasm so as to make it voluntary like a hobby, which later turns into a reading culture. In this respect, we can challenge the notion that if you want to hide anything from a Rwandan, and an African at large, you will simply 'put it in a book'. Finally, to paraphrase an old African saying 'it takes a village to raise a child', it also takes a nation to develop a culture of reading.

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fundamental to one's selfhood or subjectivity, and the process of racialization or ethnicization—in other words, the politicization of race or ethnicity—is not taken into account. The social and political construction of identity—the fact that we are invited to identify with this or that category, that we identify ourselves as belonging to this or that group, and that this identification can be used as a powerful political tool, including the justification of extreme acts of violence—should factor into the discussion of ethno-political conflicts.