The Role of Collective Memory in Post-Conflict Societies

I. Introduction

- Hook: More than two decades after the Rwandan genocide, public commemorations continue to shape national identity.

- Background: Collective memory refers to the shared pool of knowledge and narratives that communities pass on.

- Research Question: How does collective memory influence reconciliation and political stability in societies emerging from violent conflict?

- Thesis Statement: Collective memory can promote healing by preserving truth and fostering dialogue, but it also risks deepening divisions when narratives remain contested.

II. Literature Review

- Foundational theories: Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann on memory studies

- Case studies: Rwanda, Bosnia, and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

- Psychological perspectives on trauma and intergenerational transmission of memory

- Gaps in existing research: comparative approaches across regions and long-term impact on governance

III. Methodology

- Qualitative approach: interviews with survivors, community leaders, and policymakers

- Sources: memorial sites, oral histories, government archives, and NGO reports

- Analysis: thematic coding of narratives to trace patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and reinterpretation

IV. Results/Findings

- Rwanda: government-led narrative of unity vs. suppressed ethnic differences

- Bosnia: fragmented memories along ethnic lines, reflected in education and media

- South Africa: successes and criticisms of the TRC in shaping national discourse

- Emerging pattern: the balance between official narratives and grassroots memory practices

V. Discussion

The power of memory in legitimizing political authority

Risks of selective memory leading to marginalization of minority voices

Implications for peacebuilding policies and international interventions

The need for mechanisms that balance truth-telling with inclusivity

VI. Conclusion

- Restate thesis: collective memory remains both a tool and a weapon in post-conflict contexts

- Significance: stable reconciliation depends on managing memory responsibly

- Future research: explore digital memory spaces (social media, online archives) and their role in shaping collective memory across generations

VII. References

- Memory studies scholarship, conflict-resolution literature, and human rights reports