

Reflections by the "Healing the Memories of Niger" team PART 1

Our country, Niger, has experienced a number of traumatic events that have caused individual and collective wounds. Some of these events are linked to conflicts with other continents, particularly Europe, with colonisation and forced labour.

Other events can be described as local and have caused collective and individual wounds, such as the armed rebellion of the 1990s and terrorism in the Sahel states.

As far as the old wounds linked to our collective experience in Niger are concerned, we remember the forced labour that is always mentioned when a third party asks you to work beyond your capacity, to the point that we end up with an expression known to every Nigerien: "POTOL-GOY", literally "forced labour", in other words without pay and with punishment.

During negotiations, workers' representatives remind the authorities that the days of forced labour are over when the authorities want to force them to withdraw their demands or sign protocols. Individuals also use this expression to show that forced labour is over and that nothing can be achieved by force.

-The recent collective wound felt on an individual level relates essentially to the acts of barbarism perpetrated by terrorist groups such as Aqmi, Boko Haram and the Sahel Islamic States. These terrorist groups attack populations, slit the throats of village chiefs, heads of families, marabouts, state officials (health workers, teachers, etc.), kill soldiers, kidnap women, young girls and schoolchildren, and demand that schools be closed. They also loot crops, set fire to granaries and take away people's animals.

All these acts wound the community and the individuals.

These wounds are manifested in the rejection of the communities from which the terrorists come; mistrust and hatred towards these groups; and the fear of the victimised populations to return to their homelands.