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7

WE ARE PRETENDING PEACE: LOCAL MEMORY AND THE ABSENCE OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION IN RWANDA

Susanne Buckley-Zistel

How do we keep the past alive without becoming its prisoner?
How do we forget it without risking its repetition in the future?

—Ariel Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden*

After extreme violence, coming to terms with the past is a major challenge for any society. The experience of pain and suffering is deeply inscribed in individual and collective memory, and perpetuated through the stories people narrate about the event, often keeping the dichotomy of us/them or friend/enemy alive, and obstructing paths to reconciliation. A necessary social transformation, which renders future massacres impossible, therefore depends to a large extent on the way the past is remembered.

In Rwanda, people who lived through the 1994 genocide of Tutsis and their Hutu and Twa sympathisers, as well as the 1990-94 war between the Habyarimana government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), have different recollections of the past, depending on their role at the time and their situation today. Yet Rwanda's memoryscape is not simply informed by recollection. Eclipsing the past, if only in parts, is also a feature of coming to terms with the atrocities. Remembering and forgetting are equally important in post-genocide Rwanda. At first sight, what is remembered and what is forgotten seem paradoxical: while the event of the genocide, its death and destruction, is constantly evoked in conversations among Rwandans, discussion of the causes of the genocide and the decades of tensions between Hutu and Tutsi, including pogroms against Tutsis in 1959, 1962 and 1973, is being silenced and the past portrayed as harmonious.

What becomes apparent upon closer examination is that the absence of memory about past cleavages is less the result of an inability to remember than a conscious strategy by my interviewees to cope with living in proximity to "killers" or "traitors".[1] At the local level today, many Rwandans are *pretending peace*. Consequently, the way of forgetting, as I shall explore it in this article, should not be confused with a mental failure to recall, but with the intentional silencing of some aspects of the past. To describe this phenomenon, I shall introduce the notion of *chosen amnesia,* the deliberate loss of memory.

The objective of this chapter is to understand local processes of social transition and reconciliation in Rwanda. After depicting how ethnic cleavages have been polarised, if not invented,[2] through history and memory since colonialism, I shall proceed by highlighting which memories of the genocide are presently evoked, and which ones are forgotten in local discourses. The focus on memory, reflected in narratives about the past, will help us understand how identities are constituted in discourse and language, and whether they allow for greater group cohesion or reinforce the ethnic cleavages between Hutu and Tutsi which gave rise to genocide and other massacres. This discussion will then lead to an examination of the dangers inherent in remembering some aspects of Rwanda's past while eclipsing others. I conclude the chapter with some thoughts on how outsiders can support processes of social transformation and reconciliation in Rwanda.

Reconciliation processes in Rwanda

Generally, since the end of the Cold War, there has been an increasing interest in reconciliation processes around the world.[3] The founding of academic research institutes such as INCORE (University of Ulster), the South Africa-based Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (University of the Witwatersrand) and the recently-established Centre for the Study of Forgiveness and Reconciliation (Coventry University) reflects the importance of this issue. Many responses to violent conflicts are centred around themes such as law (punishment, compensation, deterrence); history (truth); theology (forgive-

1 The argument is based on substantial field research in Nyamata district in Kigali Ngali province (in particular around Nyamata town and Ntarama) and in Gikongoro province (around the districts of Gikongoro Ville, Karaba and Nyaruguru) in 2003-4. The sites were selected for their proximity to mass graves and genocide memorial sites, including Murambi, Karaba, Kibeho, Nyamata and Ntarama Although there are substantial differences between the two regions, these differences are not relevant to the argument of this article.

2 In this chapter, the notion of ethnicity is not understood as an essential, primordial concept, but as a form of belonging that has become significant over space and time.

3 For an overview see A. Rigby, *Justice and Reconciliation: After the Violence* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

ness); therapy (healing); art (commemorations and disturbance); and education (lesson learning).[4]

Regarding Rwanda, much of the literature on reconciliation processes focuses on justice.[5] This mirrors a wider tendency among observers to concentrate on serious crimes, and to make justice one of the preconditions for a reconciliation process.[6] A predominantly top-down, judicial view of war-torn societies, however, misses the serious social impact of violence at the community level, as critically remarked by Fletcher and Weinstein:

> To date, truth and justice have been the rallying cries for efforts to assist communities in (re)building in the aftermath of mass atrocities. These employ a paradigm that focuses on individuals who have been wronged (victims) and those who inflicted their wounds (perpetrators). Missing is an appreciation for the damage mass violence causes at the level of communities.[7]

This chapter adopts a different approach, seeking to draw attention to local experiences of the genocide and their impact on community-based reconciliation processes in Rwanda. The focus is therefore on local, intimate environments of mainly rural Rwandans and how they come to terms with the horrific experiences of the past. This seems even more significant since there appears to be a gap between assumptions about an advancing national reconciliation process and the reality on the hills.[8] On a more general note,

> [a] crucial problem in the post-conflict agenda relates to the lack of reliable, quality knowledge. Ambassadors, aid coordinators, and programme managers often feel that they do not know what's 'really' going on, even in the areas of direct concern to them. Why are certain policies adopted, and what are their likely consequences? What divi-

4 M. Minow, "Breaking the Cycles of Hatred", in M. Minow (ed.), *Breaking the Cycles of Hatred: Memory, Law, and Repair* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 27.

5 See for instance C. Fisiy, "Of Journeys and Border Crossings: Return of Refugees, Identity, and Reconstruction in Rwanda", *African Studies Review,* 41, 1 (1998), 17-28; A. Corey and S.F. Joireman, "Retributive Justice: The *Gacaca* Courts in Rwanda", *African Affairs* 103, (2004), 73-89; E. Daly, "Between Punitive and Reconstructive Justice: the *Gacaca* Courts in Rwanda", *International Law and Politics* 34 (2002), 355-96; S. Gasibirege and S. Babalola, *Perceptions about the Gacaca Law in Rwanda: Evidence from a Multi-Method Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, Centre for Communication Programs, 2001); J. Sarkin, "The Tension Between Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Politics, Human Rights, Due Process and the Role of *Gacaca* Courts in Dealing with the Genocide", *Journal of African Law,* 45, 2 (2001), 143-72.

6 For instance, Lederach defines reconciliation as situated between justice, truth, mercy and peace. See J.P. Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace (1997), 30. His argument has been adopted by Rigby (2001).

7 L. Fletcher and H. Weinstein, "Violence and Social Repair: Rethinking the Contribution of Justice to Reconciliation", *Human Rights Quarterly* 24, 3 (2002), 637.

8 This perception is based on conversations with national and international actors in Kigali during the fieldwork period.

sions exist within political elites and the military? … What does the population think about these matters? In many post-conflict countries, especially those where insecurity still reigns and where authoritarian regimes are in power, donors are groping in the dark with these crucial questions.[9]

In order to increase the availability of knowledge, this chapter will illustrate how antagonisms based on ethnic identities of Hutu or Tutsi persist between the parties to the conflict, revealing the continuity of ethnic cleavages and the absence of social transformation. While this observation is of course not surprising, after little more than a decade as well as the scale and horror of the 1994 genocide, it nevertheless finds little recognition among many Rwandan and international researchers and policy-makers alike.

Ontological impact of memory and amnesia

According to Hinchman and Hinchman, narratives can be defined as "discourses with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience, and thus offer insights about the world and people's experience of it."[10] A narrative approach thus recognises that stories "are not simple representations of a reality but that they involve selectivity, rearranging, redescription, and simplification. Narratives mediate between the self and the world."[11] In other words, the past is never portrayed as it actually happened, but rather it is always interpreted anew, involving the deliberate but also often unintentional inclusion and exclusion of information. The way people explain their past therefore serves a particular function which may change depending on their audience and circumstances. These narratives can serve the purpose of establishing a collective identity and bounded community of all who share the same interpretation of the past. There is therefore a

dialectic relationship between experience and narrative, between the narrating self and the narrated self. As humans, we draw on our experience to shape narratives about our lives, but equally, our identity and character are shaped by our narratives. People emerge from and as the products of their stories about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives.[12]

The narratives on which people draw to refer to their past thus have a strong ontological impact. In the case of Rwanda, for instance, people are not simply

9 P. Uvin, "The Development/Peacebuilding Nexus: A Typology and History of Changing Paradigms", *Journal of Peacebuidling and Development* 1, 1 (2002), 10.

10 L. Hinchman and S. Hinchman, "Introduction" in L. Hinchman and S. Hinchman (eds), *Memory, Identity, Community* (Albany: State of New York Press, 1997), xx.

11 Ibid., xvi.

12 P. Antze and M. Lambek, "Introduction: Forecasting Memory" in Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (eds), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York/London: Routledge, 1996), xviii.

formed by their experience of, say, the genocide, but also by the ways in which they refer to it. This performative function of narratives is particularly important regarding collective identities, since a common interpretation of the past helps create group cohesion. Remembrance can have a coercive force, because it creates identity and a sense of belonging.[13] By defining the relationship to the past, memory shapes the future.

Chosen amnesia

It is not only what is articulated in collective memory, however, that has an ontological impact, but also what is not said.[14] In Rwanda, aspects of the past seem to be eclipsed from the discourse, creating a form of amnesia, albeit selective, or what I call *chosen amnesia*. The absence of memory and history is equally instructive in an ontological sense, regarding the constant harking back to a past in order to constitute an identity in the present and future.

Two aspects are central to my notion of *chosen amnesia* as a framework within which to discuss social reconciliation processes in Rwanda. First, the term *amnesia* is used as an analogy for eclipsing the past. This is different from its traditional, psychological form, which makes reference to the lack of memory about events that occurred during a particular period. Here the loss of memory may be caused by severe emotional trauma, and is often temporary in response to an event with which the mind struggles to cope. It is important to note, however, that my use of the term "amnesia" in this chapter does not derive from a psychological, medical condition of repressed memory, but should rather be understood as an analogy for eclipsing the past or for not wanting to remember. Significantly, amnesia is different from remembering differently. It does not refer to a fading of memory or a different interpretation of the past, but to not wanting to draw on a particular recollection that is nevertheless still stored in the mind.

Second, therefore, "chosen" suggests a degree of agency; that is, a conscious selection process by an individual or a community to eclipse sections of the past. As stated above, the issue is not the assessment of a mental condition, but of a societal strategy of dealing with its tormenting experiences. This strategy points to an immediate benefit of not remembering, and thus serves a particular function, which I will illustrate later in this chapter. In sum, *chosen amnesia* signifies the deliberate choice to not remember some aspects of the past.

13 P. Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History", in P. Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, *Vol. 1: Conflict and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 11.

14 For a discussion about various ways of eclipsing the past, see S. Cohen, *States of Denial. Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

My coinage of the term *chosen amnesia* is inspired by Vamik Volkan's notion of *chosen trauma*, which occurs when a group, after the experience of a painful event, feels helpless and victimised by another group. In Volkan's words,

> the group draws the mental representations or emotional meanings of the traumatic event into its very identity, and then it passes on the emotional and symbolic meaning from generation to generation. For each generation the description of the actual event is modified; what remains is its role in... the group identity.[15]

In this sense, *chosen trauma* is produced by, and at the same time produces, a collective identity. The repetition of narratives about the traumatic event constructs the group's identity in opposition to the identity of the opponent who caused the trauma, and as such it becomes a social reality for those who participate in this discourse. A common identity, a "we-feeling", is shared between the people who recall the same past, rendering their social interaction meaningful.

While one of the functions of *chosen trauma* is to encourage group cohesion and a collective identity, *chosen amnesia* has the opposite effect. Through eclipsing of memory, the collective experience of an event is neglected, preventing the interpretation of a shared, group-specific past and the production of a "we-feeling". *Chosen amnesia* does not introduce a sense of closure, nor does it produce a bounded identity, but rather it allows for more flexible inclusion in, and exclusion from, collective identities. As I will show, this might be necessary when survivors and perpetrators live together in one community.

Whether an event is remembered or eclipsed is highly dependent on circumstances, environments and audiences. In one example cited by Liisa Malkki, people with the same background—in her case Burundian Hutu refugees in Tanzania—could either draw their memory into their very identity, as was the case with refugees living in isolation in refugee camps, or try to escape their history, as did the urban refugees who preferred to assimilate into the Tanzanian society in order to survive.[16] Importantly, however, in the Rwandan context, not only do people not only have many different stories to tell or eclipse, but these different stories are also told at different societal levels. There are, among other divisions, strong local/national and public/private divides. It is crucial therefore to note that my concept of *chosen amnesia*, and its reference to reconciliation, are applied exclusively to local public memory, where "local" signifies the societal level of bounded communities and neighbourhoods. This is opposed to the national level, where memory work is a highly politicised, top-

15 V. Volkan, "On Chosen Trauma", *Mind and Human Interaction*, 3, 13 (1991).

16 L. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago University Press, 1995).

down governmental project.[17] In turn, "public" refers to the discourse at broad communal levels, including often mutually distrustful neighbours or strangers, such as researchers (both foreign and national). This can be juxtaposed with the private, intimate realm of the family, in the safety of which specifically Hutu or Tutsi views of past, present and future can be shared.

The question arises, why do people in Rwanda opt for eclipsing key aspects of the past, particularly when the past is as disturbing as Rwanda's experience in the twentieth century? What is the benefit of avoiding the production of rigidly bounded communities and firmly fixed boundaries demarcating friend and foe? After a brief account of how the interpretation of Rwanda's history has led to ethnic cleavages, the following section will illustrate what is remembered in Rwanda today, in order to then show what is deliberately forgotten.

Divided through history: the origins of ethnic antagonisms

History and memory have been the source of conflict in Rwanda for decades.[18] Since the beginning of historical writing, first by German and subsequently by Belgian colonial anthropologists, Rwanda's historical discourse has essentially been a top-down political project either to establish group cohesion or separation.[19] The colonial administration introduced the since-discredited "Hamitic hypothesis", which argued that the Tutsis originated from northern and eastern Africa, while Hutus belonged to the Bantu people and constituted the indigenous population of the country. This account was subsequently adopted by Rwandan scholars such as Alexis Kagame, and in turn by large segments of the population.[20] Moreover, Tutsis, who constituted the monarchy and who allegedly bore a physical resemblance to Europeans, were inculcated by the colonialists with notions of superiority, while Hutus were identified as common farmers. With the advent of independence, the feeling of inferiority grew among

17 Nevertheless, the national policy of remembrance and history-writing also includes a selective recollection of the past, but to discuss the national nation-building discourse would extend the scope of this chapter.

18 See for instance C. Newbury, "Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda" in D.E. Lorey and W.H. Beezley (eds), *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 67-84; S. Ngesi and C. Villa-Vincencio, "Rwanda: Balancing the Weight of History" in E. Doxtader and C. Villa-Vincenio (eds), *Through Fire with Water: The Roots of Division and the Potential for Reconciliation in Africa* (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 2003), 1-63.

19 For a more detailed account, see S. Buckley-Zistel, "Dividing and Uniting: The Use of 'Citizenship' in Conflict and Reconciliation in Rwanda" (Roundtable, forthcoming).

20 A. Kagame, *Un Abrégé de l'ethno-histoire du Rwanda* (Butare: Editions Universitaires du Rwanda, 1972).

Hutus, leading to the so-called "Social Revolution" of 1959, which marked the end of royal Tutsi supremacy and the first pogroms against Tutsis.

Regardless of whether ethnic cleavages in Rwanda predate colonialism or were invented by European anthropologists, they prevail in present-day Rwanda. Since independence, ethnic differences have been successfully manipulated for political ends by various heads of state, most notably under the presidency of Grégoire Kayibanda (1962-73), as well as in the lead-up to the genocide in 1994. This manipulation manifested itself, for instance, in the successful oppression of Tutsis by authorities through manipulation of ethnicity and the achievements of the "Social Revolution" under Kayibanda. This was followed by his successor Juvénal Habyarimana (1973-94) who promoted a national development discourse that emphasised the existence of a Hutu peasant class while turning the Tutsis into feudal "enemies of the agricultural revolution";[21] and inciting ethnic hatred as a political strategy to maintain power between 1990 and 1994.[22] Until 1994, Tutsis were portrayed as foreigners, authors of injustice and enemies of the Republic, while Hutu identity was defined as the indigenous majority and former victims of injustice who emancipated themselves from the Tutsi monarchy in 1959.[23] In the 1980s this racism was less visible, and therefore was neither questioned nor abandoned. Racist prejudice between Hutus and Tutsis, but also Batwa, "was a structural feature of Rwandan society, fulfilling simultaneously important political functions for the elites and socio-psychological function for the peasant masses."[24] Nevertheless, in Rwanda and elsewhere, ethnicities should not be considered primordial features, and as necessarily in conflict, but rather

> [r]egardless of the historical components of different segments of the population, what matters is the political significance of ethnic identities. In other words, the political relevance of ethnic identities is shaped by political context. It is politics that makes ethnicity important (or, indeed, unimportant), not ethnicity which invariably defines politics.[25]

In this sense, in the lead-up to the genocide, Rwandan historians such as Ferdinand Nahimana, professor of history at the National University of Rwanda

21 P. Verwimp, "Development Ideology, the Peasantry and Genocide: Rwanda Represented in Habyarimana's Speeches", *Journal of Genocide Research* 2, 3 (2000), 327.

22 A. Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999).

23 F. Rutembesa, "Le discours sur le peuplement comme instrument de manipulation identitaire", *Cahiers du Centre de Gestion de Conflits*, 5 (2002), 83.

24 P. Uvin, "Prejudices, Crisis, and Genocide in Rwanda", *African Studies Review* 40, 2, (1997), 91.

25 C. Newbury and D. Newbury, *Identity, Genocide, and Reconstruction in Rwanda* (1995), Paper presented at to the European Parliament, Brussels.

and director of the infamous radio station Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), one of the key vehicles of hate speech before and during the genocide, successfully exploited these politically-manipulated ethnic divisions to incite violence against Tutsis.

An awareness of the damaging impact of history on Rwanda's past has generated fierce debates among Rwandan scholars and political leaders about how national history should be portrayed. To illustrate the struggle over different interpretations, in 1998 a conference was held at the National University of Rwanda in Butare, provocatively entitled, "*Changements politiques survenues en 1959. Oui ou non, y avait-il une révolution*?" ("The Political changes of 1959. Was there a revolution or not?"). The scholars and intellectuals present were unable to find an answer to the question, and Rwandan history has not officially been taught in Rwandan schools since 1994.[26]

Remembering and forgetting today

In societies with poor formal education and knowledge transmission, such as Rwanda, collective memory, expressed in day-to-day encounters and oral history, is of greater significance than official history.[27] At the local level, in particular, the social environment shapes what is collectively recalled and what is forgotten.[28] Not surprisingly, after the genocide, remembering in Rwanda is not uncontested: different groups in Rwanda have different views on the past.

Many survivors, for example, have lost not only their loved ones during the genocide but also all of their property, and many therefore struggle to make ends meet. In addition, many women are infected with HIV/AIDS, since rape was used as a strategic weapon during the genocide, and are today, together with their children, dying slowly from the consequences of the genocide.[29] A large proportion of impoverished, rural survivors feels neglected by the gov-

26 According to the Director of Curriculum Development, Rwanda is still in the early stages of developing a national history curriculum, even though history is taught at some schools at the discretion of the individual teachers: Interview with the Director of the National Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Scientific Research, Government of Rwanda, Kigali (4 December 2003).

27 J.-P. Schreiber, "*Le génocide, la mémoire et l'histoire*", in R. Verdier, E. Decaux and J.-P. Chretien (eds), *Rwanda. Un Genocide du XXe Siecle* (Paris: Harmattan, 1995), 169. An important point is that memory and history are not identical concepts. For a discussion see P. Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History" (1993).

28 M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

29 During the genocide, many rapists were aware that they were HIV/AIDS positive, and used their infection as a way of killing. For further discussion, see African Rights, *Broken Bodies, Torn Spirits: Living with Genocide, Rape and HIV/AIDS*, Kigali: African Rights (2004); and AVEGA, *Survey on Violence Against Women in Rwanda*, Kigali: AVEGA (1999).

ernment; their call for compensation has so far been ignored, for financial and political reasons.[30] Since the experience of the violence is central to their existence, remembering the genocide is of major importance and each year groups of survivors gather at the numerous memorial sites for commemoration events. The significance of memory is reflected in the following quotes:

> We have to remember people who died in 1994. It is important to remember someone that you love, a relative, a friend. We have to commemorate it in order to put a mechanism of prevention in place, and to ask God to help us. For me, we cannot forget what happened.
>
> *(Elderly female survivor, whose son has confessed to participating in genocide killings, Gikongoro)*

> Yes, of course we have to remember in order to fight the ideology and to avoid this happening again. And a lesson for Rwandan youth is to be aware of what happened. So, for instance, when you touch a fire it hurts, and teaches you to avoid touching it again.
>
> (Young male, born in exile in Burundi, who returned after the genocide, Nyamata)

A different attitude to remembering is expressed by the accused and their families. While the genocide is a prime example of mass participation in violence,[31] it is mostly Hutus who have been accused and imprisoned, although some have recently been released provisionally after confessing to their crimes.[32] Since the Rwandan justice system is completely overstretched, and the village-based Gacaca tribunals only reached the judgement phase of the process in 2005 and only in a few jurisdictions, most detainees sense that they have little hope of a fair trial in the near future.[33] At home, having a family member in prison is an immense burden for an impoverished Rwandan household, and many Hutu wives struggle, and often fail, to simultaneously cultivate the land and care for their children. Moreover, some Rwandans also support their prisoner spouses by providing food and clothing, placing a further burden on the family. Consequently, as the quotes below illustrate, many accused and their dependants feel that they are the true victims of the genocide. Furthermore, many Hutus perished after the genocide in refugee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in overcrowded prisons or at the hands of the post-genocide

30 The national Compensation Fund, which designates 10 per cent of the annual budget to survivors, remains a contested issue in Rwanda. Not only is the country's budget far too small to pay compensation, it is also not sufficiently transparent, and to many rural survivors, it is unclear whether the Fund actually exists and who benefits from it.

31 R. Lemarchand, "Coming to Terms with the Past: The Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda", *Observatoire de l'Afrique centrale* (23 July 2000), 1.

32 African Rights, "Prisoner Releases a Risk for the *Gacaca* System", Kigali (16 January 2003).

33 Personal fieldnotes.

Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA). Having lost spouses, parents, siblings or other relatives, many Hutus do not understand why they are not allowed to mourn their dead publicly and why they are not included in the national commemoration ceremonies, as illustrated below:

To remember is good, but it should be inclusive. For instance, my parents were killed during the genocide. But when they [the public] remember they remember only Tutsi, so I am frustrated because they don't remember my family.

(Young rural woman, Nyamata)

It is important not to forget the past so that we can prevent the future. But the bad was not only the genocide but also the Hutu who died in the DRC from diseases, and also those who were killed in revenge when they came back. Nobody has won this war; everybody has lost at least one family member.

(Elderly rural man, Nyamata)

What becomes apparent from the above quotes is that even though memory of the genocide is significant in Rwanda, there is a conflict over how it should be remembered. While some, in particular the survivors and their families, insist that only the agony of the Tutsis should be recalled, others argue that all suffering needs recognition. A closer look reveals that this split goes along Tutsi/Hutu lines, illustrating, yet also perpetuating, ethnic divisions.

Paradoxically, in contrast to my interviewees' memories of the genocide as illustrated above, their memories about the ethnic cleavages that led to the genocide have today disappeared, and the past is described as having been harmonious. This is apparent in the following statements in which my interviewees portray the killings as a sudden rupture:

The war was created by the state and the authorities. We as peasants did not know what was happening. Before we were living together, sharing everything. Only when the genocide started did divisions start.

(Young man, Nyamata)

According to me, I cannot determine who is responsible for the genocide. We heard that people were being killed without knowing who planned it.

(Young rural woman with husband in prison, Nyamata)

You know, we did not know how it came. We were friends, the same people, sharing everything. We are innocent in this situation.

(Elderly male farmer, Nyamata)

Against the backdrop of the pogroms against Tutsis in 1959, 1962 and 1973, the insistence on past harmony is surprising since, as I argued above and as has also been stated by Peter Uvin, the Rwandan genocide was situated in a context of

deeply entrenched images of ethnic divisions and dynamics of social exclusion.[34] Today, these divisions still find expression in day-to-day attitudes. A rich person, for instance, is occasionally referred to as "a Tutsi" regardless of her or his ethnic identity, while "I am not your Hutu" is used to fend off exploitation.[35]

Pretending peace

The public forgetting of past cleavages and antagonisms, however, does not mean that these divisions are of no importance today. Rather, this *chosen amnesia* constitutes a deliberate social coping mechanism to deal with the disruptive experiences of the past. The code of silence that constrains much of the post-genocide discourse of these issues is expressed in the following quotation:

> Just after the war there were many problems. People returned from exile; there were also revenge killings. People could not talk to each other. Everybody was afraid of everybody. Today, it is as if we have forgotten everything. At the moment it does not exist any more. People never talk about the past because it brings back bad memories and problems. We pretend it does not exist.
>
> (Elderly man who had just been released from prison, Nyamata)

This coping mechanism is necessary since, against the backdrop of rural life, many Rwandans often feel that they do not have the choice to articulate their grievances publicly because it would upset the social balance. They are concerned instead with going about daily life in the community. According to the Rwandan historian Charles Ntampaka, it may be two or three generations before the situation permits individuals to speak out about their experiences of the genocide.[36]

In many cases, motivations for local coexistence oscillate between pragmatism and fear. As for pragmatism, on the one hand, Rwandans have an interest in living together, simply because they have no choice. In an environment in which all depend on all, as is the case on the Rwandan hills, survival and prosperity require collaboration. When people fall ill, for instance, neighbours help each other to carry the sick to hospital. Cultivation of the fields is also more efficient when carried out collectively. Moreover, some survivors even find themselves dependent on the murderers of their family to bring water to their sickbed. The dependency of survivors, in particular, is expressed in the following statement:

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34 P. Uvin, "Reading the Rwandan Genocide", *International Studies Review*, 3, 3 (2001), 97.

35 Personal fieldnotes.

36 C. Ntampaka, "Memoire et Reconciliation au Rwanda: Ecart Entre les Pratiques Populaire et les Actions de l'Authorité", *Dialogue*, 226 (2002), 17.

We have to be courageous. Living in the community, we cannot live alone. A survivor cannot live alone. For example, we live with a family who killed our relatives. We have to relax and remain confident, and pretend that there is peace. *Kwishyra mu Mutuzo*.

(Woman of mixed parentage who was married to a Tutsi and had lost all of her and most of her husband's family, Gikongoro)

The Kinyarwanda phrases *Kwishyra mu Mutuzo* or *Kwihao Amahoro* mean "pretending peace" and signify a coping mechanism by which all antagonism is silenced to maintain the social equilibrium. According to my interviewees, this concept reflects many people's *modus operandi* and often constitutes the only possible way of living in the midst of mutual distrust. This coping mechanism is what I have described as *chosen amnesia*.

Fear of the other group, on the other hand, is often linked to the prospect of testifying at Gacaca courts, regardless of whether this is as a victim, witness or perpetrator. According to my interviewees, this sense of fear was heightened by the murder of several survivors in Kaduha in Gikongoro province, in 2003.[37] However, while survivors are more concerned with being eliminated as witnesses, Hutus fear being accused and imprisoned unjustly for social or economic reasons: denouncing, rightly or wrongly, a genocide perpetrator has become a convenient way of getting rid of personal enemies and competitors.[38]

It is not surprising, however, that, generally speaking, insecurity is a greater issue for survivors than for suspects and the wider population. In particular, survivors who have chosen to stay on their family's land in rural Rwanda, and who are thus in many cases surrounded by the families of those who killed their kin, are often subjected to intimidation, which has increased with the first waves of releases of genocide perpetrators since 2003.[39] Nevertheless, a frequent, almost paradoxical response of my interviewees to questions about security was "cohabitation is peaceful since we don't dare to attack each other"[40]—or, as stated by a representative of AVEGA, the widows' survivor organisation:

We don't have any problems living together. But we also don't have a choice. If we don't live together the genocide will start again.

37 The number of survivors killed in Kaduha is variously estimated between two and four. See for instance IRIN, "Rwanda: Genocide Survivor Group Denounces Killings, Harassment", Nairobi, 16 December 2003, www.irinnews.org; IRIN (2004): "Rwanda: Kagame Dismisses District Leaders over Genocide-related Deaths", Nairobi, 14 May 2004, www.irinnews.org; IRIN (2004): "Rwanda: Five Sentenced to Death over Killings of Genocide Survivors", IRIN: Nairobi, 1 March 2004, www.irinnews.org. The increasing fear of witnesses since the murders was also the theme of a Coexistence Network meeting on "*La protection des témoignages du génocide: une des conditionnalités de la réussite du processus Gacaca*", Kigali, 25 February 2004.

38 Interview with human rights activist, Kigali (26 April 2004).

39 Personal fieldnotes from Gikongoro and Nyamata, 2003-4.

40 Personal fieldnotes.

(AVEGA representative, Nyamata)

Absence of social transformation and reconciliation

As illustrated above, memory and forgetting in Rwanda are selective, and serve the purpose of maintaining some form of social harmony in an environment where victims and perpetrators live side-by-side. Arguably, therefore, *chosen amnesia* is a necessity for local communities emerging from atrocities. From an ontological perspective, to deliberately eclipse some stories about the past prevents a sense of closure and fixed boundary-drawing between one identity group and another. It constitutes a deferral and deliberate leaving open of bounded, in this case Hutu or Tutsi, communities, which is essential for day-to-day survival and allows for "pretending peace".

This phenomenon resonates in Andrew Rigby's argument that too much memory obstructs healing wounds of war, since the past continues to dominate the present.[41] Rigby argues,

> the desire to cover up the past can also be the wish of people at the grass-roots. This is particularly so if many of them share a past that they would rather forget because of their active involvement in, or complicity with, the evil that was perpetrated in their name. For people who have been involved in phenomena such as mass violence that can happen in a civil war, it can certainly seem as if the past is best left behind. To introduce it into the present might lead to further bloodshed, conflict and pain.[42]

In contrast, but with similar implications, Murray Last suggests that after violence, communities need time to come to terms with the experience of the past. "As 'wounded'," he argues, "metaphorically people turn in on themselves, curl up, lie still—at least until they get their strength back and the pain goes."[43] Last's comment recalls the German experience, where addressing the Holocaust and dealing with disturbing memories and feelings of guilt and responsibility have taken many decades and continue today. What was peculiar to the German experience, though, was that only a small number of Jewish survivors remained in the country, thus avoiding much direct confrontation between victims and perpetrators, which would have required an immediate resolution.

Rwanda, however, does not have this luxury of time and distance. Given the harsh living conditions and the intimacy of life on the hills, as well as the mutual dependency of many Rwandans, ethnic cleavages simply cannot remain unattended. A "memory wall"[44] against the recent past would bear serious dangers,

41 Rigby, *Justice and Reconciliation: After the Violence,* 2.

42 Ibid.

43 M. Last, "Healing the Wounds of War", Lecture at University College London, London, 2000 (M. Last's personal notes).

44 P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

since an unresolved past inevitably returns to haunt a society in transition.[45] As argued in this chapter and elsewhere in this volume by Melvern, Kayigamba and Gasana, the 1994 genocide was, among other things, the result of pre-existing ethnic cleavages and subsequent feelings of resentment which people harboured, enabling the authorities to manipulate these emotions and to incite large parts of the population to kill. These circumstances persist: today, the prevailing social structures could again be exploited through hate speech and propaganda, potentially leading to new outbreaks of violence.[46] Crucially, only a transformation of the ethnic cleavages that run through Rwandan society can prevent future massacres. To date, such a transformation has not taken place. Despite the unity discourse of the Rwandan government, which promotes an all-Rwandan identity based on citizenship and not on ethnic identity[47]—as also explored in this volume by Kayigamba, Lemarchand and Hintjens—the dichotomy of Hutu/Tutsi remains effectively unchallenged, and is perpetuated in the current form of memory and amnesia as illustrated in this chapter. What is absent, yet required to overcome this problem, is a transformation of the way in which different groups relate to one another. For Rwanda, such a transformation process would entail challenging and changing the prevailing social structures of ethnic identity, so that people would not identify themselves as exclusively Hutu or Tutsi, or at least would not view these identity labels as conflicting. As a result of such a transformation process, peace in Rwanda would no longer be defined in negative terms, as the absence of violence, but in positive terms as being, ultimately, "about restoring sociality, about establishing the trust necessary not just to tolerate but to cooperate in partnership that can survive even the threat of failure."[48]

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45 J. Sarkin, "The Tension Between Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Politics, Human Rights, Due Process and the Role of *Gacaca* Courts in Dealing with the Genocide", *Journal of African Law,* 45, 2 (2001), 147.

46 My conclusions resonate in the concerns raised in the report on the findings of the Ad-hoc Parliament Commission on Genocide Ideology, which states that "[t]hose who revive the genocide ideology spread words and acts that stir up ethnic hatred and conflicts amongst Rwandans". (Ad-hoc Parliament Commission on Genocide Ideology, *Final Report: English Summary*, Kigali: Parliament of Rwanda, June/July 2004).

47 To discuss the national unity and reconciliation strategy of the Rwandan government would exceed the scope of this article. Arguably, however, the promotion of an all-Rwandan identity takes place without addressing the cleavages and problems at the root of the conflict, and thus constructs a top-down unity without reconciliation. The introduction of closure through enforced unity bears the danger of new antagonism and resentment, since differences are being eradicated and legitimate grievances silenced. For a detailed discussion see Susanne Buckley-Zistel, "Dividing and Uniting", forthcoming.

48 M. Last, "Reconciliation and Memory in Postwar Nigeria" in D. Veena, A. Kleinman, M. Ramphele and P. Reynolds (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity*, Berkeley: University of California Press (2000), 379.

Supporting transition and reconciliation

From a more practical perspective, the question remains, how can such a local transformation process be encouraged by those outside these communities, such as national or international organisations? How can the mediation of different forms of memory and amnesia, as illustrated in this chapter, be assisted so that they support reconciliation processes?

Crucially, given the impact of the experience of violence at the local level, external organisations must find means of supporting transformative processes that originate within communities.[49] What is discernible, in conversations with individuals and groups of survivors, suspects and their families, and more impartial community members, is a request for mediation or facilitation between victims and offenders, in order to move out of their stalemate situation of *chosen amnesia*. In Rwanda, the necessary local change-agents, who seek to contribute to reconciliation processes in their immediate environment through mediating between Hutu and Tutsi communities, are few but nevertheless do exist. Their efforts are often hampered, however, by a lack of support and interest by larger national or international peace-building organisations. Asked about their requirements, these actors often reply that they would appreciate receiving support at their immediate, local level where their work can have the greatest impact, rather than being subsumed into national projects. Many change-agents state that national NGOs are often too involved in advocacy and politics in the capital, resulting in a poor local presence and the ignorance of needs at the community level.[50] They lack an understanding of the deep fissures that continue to run through local communities.

Consequently, my survey of non-governmental reconciliation projects revealed that—instead of seeking to mediate antagonisms between Hutu and Tutsi communities—most projects focus almost exclusively on justice-related issues such as Gacaca or human rights[51] or on the needs of only one party, such

49 D. Pankhurst, "Issues of Justice and Reconciliation in Complex Political Emergencies: Conceptualising Reconciliation, Justice and Peace", *Third World Quarterly*, 20, 1 (1999), 255.

50 This absence was very apparent during my interviews in rural areas of Gikongoro and Nyamata. With the exception of some individuals—mainly survivors in towns or recently established villages (so called *Imudugudu*) who were members of the survivors' organisations IBUKA or AVEGA—almost none of my interviewees had ever been consulted about their experience of the genocide and the reconciliation process. Although some had heard about national NGOs or the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) they knew neither their mandate nor their programmes. Consequently, the majority of interviewees welcomed my interest in their circumstances, and the opportunity to articulate their views.

51 To what extent the Gacaca tribunals can contribute to reconciliation processes in Rwanda remains to be seen. On the basis of the present pilot trials, some tensions between Gacaca

as survivors (though all of these are of course important in their own right).[52] My survey exposed a shocking absence of projects dedicated to bringing the former parties to the conflict together—be they self-contained or in relation to Gacaca or other projects—preventing them from addressing the underlying prevailing social structures of ethnic identity.[53]

This omission can be explained through current preferences in peace-building strategies.[54] In Rwanda and elsewhere, peace-building projects conducted or funded by international organisations, in particular, often give salience to visible demands and interests. These include the reintegration of demobilised soldiers, restoration of the justice sector, development assistance to deprived regions, and support for decentralisation and democratisation. While all of these components are important, they are nevertheless based on an understanding of conflicts as deriving from incompatible goals, such as the distribution of resources, facilitating access to power, or overcoming injustice and inequality.[55] In short, they all revolve around "interests" that can be negotiated among the

justice and reconciliation are already discernible, although with varying degrees in different districts. In brief, the causes for setbacks include corruption of Gacaca judges and witnesses, intimidation and harassment of witnesses prior to testifying, verbal abuse of survivors giving testimony, the opening of wounds, limited trust in truth being spoken during trials (according to a 2003 survey 60 per cent of the general population expects "a large amount of false accusations" to be made during Gacaca: see NURC, *Sondage d'Opinion sur la Participation à la Gacaca et la Réconciliation Nationale*, Kigali: NURC (2003) 13), debates over *de facto* limitation of Gacaca jurisdiction to genocide crimes to the exclusion of war crimes, manipulation of outcomes through social and political power holders, partial or false confessions and enforced attendance of population at Gacaca sessions. While NGOs such as African Rights and Penal Reform International (PRI) have drawn attention to the pitfalls of Gacaca for some time, even the Rwandan parliament and government have recently acknowledged its flaws. (Ad-hoc Parliament Commission on Genocide Ideology, 2004, 10-12 and République du Rwanda/Service National des Juridictions Gacaca, *Le Fonctionnement des Juridictions Gacaca qui ont terminé leur 7ème Réunion*, Kigali: République du Rwanda/Service National des Juridictions Gacaca (21 January 2004). See also African Rights, *Gacaca Jurisdiction: A Shared Responsibility*, Kigali: African Rights (January 2003); LDGL, *Enquête sur l'Etat des Lieux des Juridictions Gacaca au Rwanda: Rapport Provisionaire*, Kigali: LDGL (December 2003).

52 Survey conducted in the course of the fieldwork in Rwanda in 2003-4.

53 In recognition of this deficit, at a recent Coexistence Network meeting it was proposed to extend the Gacaca tribunals with victim-offender mediation, and first steps have been taken to develop such a programme. (Coexistence Network meeting on "*La protection des témoignages du génocide: une des conditionnalités de la réussite du processus Gacaca*", Kigali, 25 February 2004).

54 For a discussion of the art of peace-building after civil conflicts, see, for instance, Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and for a critical appraisal of current donor projects in Rwanda, see S. Buckley-Zistel, "Aiding Peace? A Critical Analysis of Donor Strategies for Peace-Building in Rwanda", Frankfurt: PRIF-Report (forthcoming).

55 For further discussion, see S. Buckley-Zistel, "Development Assistance and Conflict Assessment Methodology", *Conflict, Security and Development*, 3, 1 (2003), 119-29.

parties to the conflict. What is being left untouched, though, is the "identity" aspect of conflicts, such as between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda. According to Norbert Ropers,

> Disputes … typically operate at two levels: the more or less openly negotiated level of political demands and interests, and the deeper level of collective experience, stances and attitudes integral to the formation of identity. An important role in constituting and shaping these two levels is played by events in which large numbers of the members of a group have been the victims of despotic rule, expulsion, military conquest, or some other form of violence. … If, in such instances, conflict management is confined solely to the negotiation level and to an apparently "reasonable" balance of interests, there will be a danger that the neglected "deep dimension" of collective experiences, traumas, and attitudes will manifest itself as an inexplicable "irrational" derangement.[56]

In order to highlight the necessity to also address tensions at the identity level, this chapter has sought to illustrate these neglected "deep dimensions" of lingering antagonisms between Hutu and Tutsi, through referring to what is remembered and what is forgotten. Significantly, at the local, public level ethnic cleavages are subjected to *chosen amnesia*, silencing prevailing tensions and leading many external observers to conclude that there has been significant improvement regarding local reconciliation processes. However, to acknowledge these fissures—and the subsequent risk of future violence along ethnic lines—requires a shift of peacebuilding efforts, away from so far almost predominantly interest-centred approaches to one which also seeks to address the transformation of the prevailing ethnic cleavages between Hutu and Tutsi. Instead of being nationally driven, such an approach demands a locally situated, bottom-up strategy emanating from those whose lives have been most affected.

The progress of reconciliation at the community level, as portrayed in this chapter, might appear pessimistic and in contrast with many other accounts.[57] Given the enormity of the crime of genocide and the particularities of Rwanda's living conditions, this is not surprising. And yet, after thirteen years, it is time to face the past and to challenge the prevailing, antagonistic ethnic cleavages. Caught in the deadlock of past, present, and future, it is time to ask how people can escape the prison of memory without choosing a form of amnesia that risks

56 N. Ropers, "Roles and Functions of Third Parties in the Constructive Management of Ethnipolitical Conflicts" (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 1997), 8-9.

57 See, for instance, the media coverage of the reconciliation process in the Rwandan Anglophone national newspaper (e.g. "Rwanda is Moving Forward to a Unified, Peaceful, Just and Democratic Country – Kagame", *New Times* (17-19 March 2003), 3; "Interahamwe Courier, Survivor Reconcile", *New Times* (16-19 Oct. 2003) or the collection of speeches by Paul Kagame reprinted in Uma Shankar Jha/Surya Narayan Yadav, *Rwanda: Towards Reconciliation, Good Governance and Development* (New Delhi: AIA, 2004).

repeating the same crimes. How can Rwandans overcome the prevailing cleavages to establish a lasting peace?