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Shaping Unity

National Identity Construction and Rewriting of the Past in
Rwanda

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the genocide the Rwandan government is facing the difficult task of uniting Hutus and Tutsis that for generations has been hostile to each other. In this strive references to Hutu, Tutsi and Twa have been replaced by *Rwandans* in the public discourse, and the government has rewritten history in a way suitable for its goal.

This study aims at analysing this rewriting of history, look into how it is implemented in the Rwandan society, and how this is reshaping the national identity, mainly by using theories of narrative identity construction.

The results show that the government is underlining what unites people - the pre-colonial period, and eclipse the part that seperated them - post-colonial period. The pre-colonial untiy is recalled through national symbols, traditional culture, media and public events. This is creating collective memroy and constitutes the base for a Rwandan national identity.

keywords: National Identity, Rwanda, narrative theory.

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1 Introduction

In 1994 a violent genocide took place in Rwanda. Within a period of 100 days the minority Tutsi were largely eliminated by the majority Hutu, and the country was damaged to the extent that it all had to be rebuilt from the ground. This painful experience left scars amongst all parties involved, but is still something that the people of Rwanda have to face, live and cope with each day. Survivors of the genocide and the genocidaires themselves are living closely and share the everyday life. The consequences of this historic event are inevitable, yet the people of Rwanda are depending on each other and have to find means to bear the experienced tragedy.

In the aftermath of the genocide the important message of “never again”, never to let genocide happen again, is imposed on the Rwandese. The Rwandan government is actively working to prevent genocidal thoughts amongst its citizens and encourages Hutus and Tutsis to reconcile. This governmental strive requires a reshaping of the collective identity - a national identity that includes and unite all Rwandans. In order to obtain this the government is focusing on what unites people that for generations been hostile and opposed to each other. This is done through rewriting the Rwandan history, romanticising the pre-colonial period where Rwandans were united and down seizing the importance of ethnicity. The government’s national reconciliation discourse is based on a view that ethnicity in Rwanda was invented and politicized by colonial occupation; therefore ethnicity never existed. Consequently, in today's public discourse, all references to Hutu, Tutsi and Twa are suppressed and have been replaced by a nation-building discourse of an all-inclusive “Rwandaness“ (Buckley-Zistel 2006:142). In public community meetings, radio broadcasts and events, which are frequently organized by the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), Rwandans are urged to reconcile with each other and to live with each other peacefully.

I will in this study take a closer look at this rewriting of history and how it is used in the Rwandan society. By using theories of narrative identity construction and national identity I will explain how the construction of the Rwandan national identity takes place.

2 Purpose, Limitation and Questions

In Rwanda, the public rewriting of history is part of the government's effort to unite the country. The government is actively trying to construct a new identity amongst its citizens, where the former's references to Hutu and Tutsi are carefully avoided. The focus is rather put on common history, language and religion, underlining that the people of Rwanda is one people with a shared past. The reshaping of a collective memory, as well as a collective forgetting, is central in the government's struggle to create a Rwandan identity. This study aims at analysing the government's version of the past and how this story is used in the Rwandan society to construct a national identity.

There is a lot of discussion around Rwanda's politics. Scholars and Human Rights activists are criticising the ruling party, Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) for a one party system and for manipulating the version of history to suit their own goals and political strive. All of those things are important to take into account when analysing Rwandans rewriting of the history, but it will not be the focus of my study. Neither is this study aiming at evaluate whether the government's version of history is "true" or not, nor in what way it is gaining RPF-politics. Instead I will, from a narrative theoretical perspective, investigate how the government's version of the Rwandan history, and its implementation in the Rwandan society, is creating an imagination of a Rwandan national identity. How this is received by the people in Rwanda is not something I will be able to answer in this study. That would require in depth study on a micro level. But by refereeing to how national identities are constructed, and how narratives constitute the shaping of collective identities, I can draw conclusions on how this story is contributing to the reshaping of the national identity in Rwanda. Central questions in my study are:

How does the government through this story, reshape the national identity?

How is this story brought out in the public sphere, and how does it contribute to the construction a national identity?

3 Method and Material

I have in this study chosen to analyse the rewriting of the Rwandan history, and how this contributes to the shaping of national identity, from a narrative theoretical approach together with theories of national identity. This study is therefore a theory consuming case study, where the case is in focus and explained by already existing theories (Esiasson et al. 2004:42)

In order to answer my questions I will analyse “The Unity of Rwandans”, that was collected at the National Reconciliation and Unity Commission’s (NURC) office in Kigali. This document constitutes the basis that the media is using when referring to and recounting history. NURC is also using this version of history when organizing events, activities and broadcasts. “The Unity of Rwandans” is therefore useful in order to answer how the Rwandan government is trying to reshape the national identity.

Theoretically, I have mainly been inspired by Margaret Somers (1994) and her theory on narrative identity construction, and by Benedict Anderson (1991) and Anne Kane’s (2000) view on how national identities are constructed. In order to answer and make sense of this analyse and the reason to why Rwanda is rewriting history I’m describing the problems Rwanda have been facing in the past, and what difficulties the society meets today. This is done through books and articles by researchers specialized on Rwanda, such as Mamdani (2000), Buckley-Zistel (2006) and Melvern (2001), among others.

4 Theory

In this chapter I will present the theories that I am using to analyse how the story of “the Unity of Rwandans” and its use in the public domain contributes to the construction of a national identity. Narrative theory is constituting the overall theoretical approach of this study, combined with Benedict Anderson’s and Anne Kane’s theory of how national identities are constructed. Those theories start out from constructivist view on collective identity as socially constructed in historical processes. Construction and reconstruction of collective identity does not, from this point of view, take place in some kind of vacuum, but in a relational setting of political struggle and the reproduction and the understanding of this struggle between people.

4.1 Narrative Theory and National Identity

National identity, just as any collective identity, is based on a shared sense of belonging and connection to a particular community. This sense of belonging is based on imaginations of similarities between the individual and his or her group, especially in relation to other groups (Kane 2000:247). Departure from Foucault’s theory, Robertson explains, these collective identities are not only constructed and recreated orally but also through political, institutional and everyday behaviour (2003:90).

In order to study identity it is important to find analytical tools that discern these patterns through which a collective identity arise, and explain how those works. The narrative identity construction focuses on stories through which a society understands and recognize itself, the narrative analyse is therefore a tool to understand how a national identity is created and recreated (Robertson 2003:91). From a narrative view stories constitute base for how a group develop a feeling of belonging and what limits this belonging has. The stories are constituting the image of “the other” - those who are not making part of the group, society or nation - and is at the same time specifying the own groups valuations, history and struggle, Somers explains (1994:607)

Benedict Anderson argues that nations are imagined communities, explained through the fact that we have only met a very limited number of people that we constitute the national belonging with. “A nation is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their

communion”(1991:6). These imagined communities are perceived as limited and sovereign in relation to other nations. One could then question how such imaged community is possible? How is it created, and how do we become a part of it? From a narrative point of view this could be explained by the fact that the members of a nation are part of a relational setting in which a construction of national culture maintains and reproduces through stories, through the use of narratives. The national identity is built upon shared beliefs and symbols which are given meaning through the use of national stories. In a narrative context national identity can be seen as a constructed imagined community which is held together by a discursive order in which institutions, public narratives and people interact in the creation of myths and symbols.

The creation of a national identity is especially dependent on the stories that are built upon “myths”, often historical oriented stories that are concentrated around critical moments that has been meaningful (or critical) for the creation of the group (Kane 2000:249). The myths and recreation of history can explain who you are and why the relationships between groups are like they are. In this way stories explain to people who they are, who “the others” are and why the social relationships between the two groups look like they do. This gives meaning to the whole world that the individuals and/or the group meet in. It is through myths we can be part of something bigger and become part of the social story “We are, as individuals and collectively, becoming who we are through being a part of, and locate ourselves in social stories”, as Somers points out (1994:606). The stories of myths can give rise to strong collective feelings, such as pride, shame, anger, loyalty etc. Those feelings are important for the creation of a national identity and to feel belonging to a group. Therefore the function the myths are crucial in creating a national identity (Kane 2000:250).

In line with the other theorists I’ve described, Chris Farrands says that one is not only constructing identity individually by relations and experience, but that identity is also society, culture and economy (Farrands 1996:1). Farrands also says that history, or rather understood history, make up a part of modern identity. He stress that “our identity is part of history, defined by our sense of history and validated by history” (1996:6). He also claims that our history is created and legitimated by our identity. “If we ask where a society or a nation comes from, it will have particular answers which fulfil particular needs and reflect a collective response to the specific context” (1996:17). Farrands points out that the myths don’t have to be historically correct, the reason to why people will still believe in them is that they want to feel affinity with a specific group. In this way the story of our history will contribute to our identity construction, but this history has at the same time fit the specific identity.

The imagination of a nation’s history is made through the constitution of a collective memory around the nation. The collective memory is made up by a process of selective appropriation where events are being related to each other, in order to give meaning to the nation itself and its origin (Somers 1994:617). Collective memory is in other words built upon stories that are selectively appropriated and emplotted in order to establish meaning, purpose and unity among actors with otherwise very different personal interests and identities. The creation of

a collective identity is not only depended on a common past and shared values, it is also in need of an imagined future and shared goals (Kane 2000). Therefore, the narratives around a nation also have to include an imagination of a common future for the group.

5 Background

To be able to analyse the “unity of Rwandans” and draw conclusions of this material I need to see the underlying meanings in the story (cf. Robertson 2003:96). In doing this I have to ask myself what the challenges of the nation are, and why the Rwandan government is using this certain story to reshape the national identity. Therefore I will present a short overview of Rwandan history and the situation today, before I start the analyse.

5.1 Hutu, Tutsi and Twa

Rwanda is inhabited by Hutu, Tutsi and Twa.¹ The Twa, a pygmy people clearly differentiated from Hutu and Tutsi, constitutes the smallest component of the Rwandan population, and have not been involved in the violent history between the other two groups.

Tutsi, which first described the status of an individual - a person rich in cattle - became the term that referred to the elite group as a whole, and the word “Hutu” - originally meaning a subordinate or follower of a more powerful person - came to refer to the mass of the ordinary people. The identification of Tutsi pastoralists as power-holders and of Hutu cultivators as subjects was becoming general when Europeans first arrived in Rwanda at the turn of the century (HRW Reports 1999).

Over time these ethnic belonging has become important for Rwandans, hostility and separations between the groups has a long history, as ethnicity has been subject of reconstruction for different political goals. The ethnic belonging has therefore always played an important role in people’s life, and constituted a great part of the individual and collective identity (Buckley-Zistel 2006:132). Today Rwanda’s government is trying to abolish the idea of ethnicity, and create an all inclusive Rwandansness, which I will get into later, but before I will present what the history has looked like in order to explain Rwandas situation today better.

5.2 Colonial Period

Rwanda was colonized by Germany in 1884, but after German lost World War I Belgium accepted the League of Nations Mandate to govern Rwanda. While Germany hadn’t paid much attention to Rwanda, the Belgian involvement in the

¹ Today, the nation is roughly made up by 84% Hutu, 15% Tutsi, and 1% Twa (HRW Reports 1999).

region was far more direct. In pre-colonial Rwanda, socio-political cleavages and inequalities were established and maintained through an aristocratic system in which Tutsi monarchs governed over Twa, Hutu and Tutsi through mainly feudal client/patron relationships (Newbury 1988). The Belgians accepted this class rule already in place, and under their colonial power the rift between Hutu and Tutsi increased. The Belgians selected the Tutsi, with an apparent physical resemblance to their European masters, as the superior race and the colonial administration subordinated Hutu and Twa to the rule of Tutsi monarch (Melvern 2000: 20-23). The Tutsi got superiority in politics and administration, and priority in education.

The difference between Hutu and Tutsi was further increased when the Belgians categorized Rwandans after ethnicity, and identity cards with their ethnic belonging were forced upon them. Until this moment the difference between Hutu and Tutsi had rather been class based, where one could “change” group according to their wealth (often counted in number of cows), or by marriage. However the classification that came with the identity cards gave the difference between the groups an ethnic dimension and resulted in increased thinking of “us” and “them”, which affected the social identity (Gourevitch 1998:56-57.). The Roman Catholic Church, who was the primary educators in Rwanda, reinforced the differences between Hutu and Tutsi, as they developed separate educational systems for each “ethnic” group. This resulted in that the vast majority of students were Tutsis, even though the majority of the people were Hutus.

Due to the unequal political system, the United Nations demanded greater self-representation of the Hutu in local affairs. Hutu sentiment against the aristocratic Tutsi was increasingly inflamed when they got recognition from the United Nations, and the Hutu “emancipation” movement was soon spearheaded by Gregoire Kayibanda, founder of PARMEHUTU. Years of discrimination was turned against the Tutsi. In reaction the Tutsi formed the UNAR party (in 1959), who desired independence for Rwanda, based on the existing Tutsi monarchy (Melvern 2000:26-27).

In 1960, the Belgian government agreed to hold democratic municipal elections in Rwanda, in which Hutu representatives were elected by the Hutu majorities. This precipitous change in the power structure threatened the centuries-old system of Tutsi superiority. Hostility and threats began between PARMEHUTU and UNAR, who were both militarized. Death on both sides followed, and a large number of Tutsi refugees fled to the surrounding countries. In 1961, Rwandans voted, by referendum and with the support of the Belgian colonial government, to abolish the Tutsi monarchy and instead establish a republic (Melvern 2000:28).

5.3 Post-Colonial Period

When Rwanda gained its independence from Belgium in 1962, the Hutu majority governed the country under President Gregoire Kayibanda and PARMEHUTU. During his presidency, Kayibanda, who even before his rule had advocated the superiority of the Hutus, began to persecute Tutsis (Gourevitch 1998:67).

President Juvénal Habyarimana came to power in 1973, and under his rule the Tutsis continued to suffer, and they continued to flee the country. Tutsi refugees in Uganda founded the military force Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), in order to invade Rwanda from Uganda. They began to launch invasions on the borders of Rwanda, which caused increased the hostility and violence between the two groups within Rwandan borders, resulting in that further more Tutsi took refugee to the neighbouring countries (Melvern 2000:28-35). The heads of the surrounding states pressured Habyarimana to do something about the conflict, mainly because they were tired of dealing with the refugee situation. The French president echoed their sentiments, and so in 1993, Habyarimana agreed to the Arusha Accords, a series of agreements creating a cease-fire, a power sharing government Hutus and Tutsis, and a safe return for refugees (Melvern 2000:37-50)

However, the Arusha Accords failed completely, as the agreement was not respected and the discrimination and violence against Tutsis continued. On the 6th of July 1994, the president was killed when his airplane was shot down near Kigali airport, and an extremist group of anti-Tutsi leaders came to power immediately afterwards. Between April and June of 1994, eight hundred thousand Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered in what has been described as the worst genocide of our time. "Radio mille collines" broadcasted hate-propaganda against the Tutsi, reminding the people of how they had been suffering in the past and demanding everyone to participate in the elimination of Tutsis (Melvern 2000:84-87). Unlike the holocaust, the Rwandan genocide was not an industrial process carried out by special units at the outskirts of the country. Rather, the government prepared the population, enraged it and incited it. Hutu civilians often massacred their own neighbours in and around their homes and churches, which makes large percentage of the Hutu population individually guilty to the genocide (Mamdani2002:11-20).

The international community did little to intervene in the bloodbath. The UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda) force had only a limited peacekeeping mandate, and where not able to stop the ongoing genocide (Melvern 2000:101-102). The genocide was instead stopped by the RPF invading from Uganda in July 1994 (Melvern 2000:245).

5.4 Rwanda Today

The genocide decimated and pauperized Rwanda's population and provoked massive forced migrations of around half of its people. In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, Rwanda lay in complete ruin, bodies were covering the streets months to come, and the infrastructure was so badly damaged that it all had to be rebuilt from the ground (Melvern 2000:253). The genocide destroyed the Rwandans' world, and the social scars among the population are inevitable. Coming to terms with the past is a major challenge.

The government has restored the physical infrastructure of the country, but their major challenge now is reach reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi. Even though reconciliation after genocide can seem bold, Rwandans have to find means to bear

the experienced tragedy and live with each other peacefully, as Hutu and Tutsi live closely together share the everyday life (Buckley-Zistel 2006:131-134).

5.4.1 National Unity and Reconciliation

The RPF has been ruling Rwanda since the genocide, and promotes reconciliation and unity amongst all Rwandans. After the rough history Rwanda has been through it is necessary to find a way to reconcile the people and make them live peacefully, as the country cannot afford another conflict.

The new constitution forbids any political activity or discrimination based on race, ethnicity or religion (NURC). The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, NURC, was formed by the government in March 1999 (NURC). The commission works actively to reach reconciliation between Rwandans on all different levels of society, underlining that Rwandans have a shared past of peace and unity. NURC and the Rwandan government also build monuments, memorial sites and museums which are reminding people of their common past and what the nation stands for today (Zorbas 2004:38). The flag and the national hymn are changed as the old ones were fostering thoughts of division, and the new motto of the nation goes: Unity, work and patriotism (NURC).

5.4.2 Solidarity Camps

The Rwandan government has employed *ingando*, or solidarity camps, to plant the seeds of reconciliation (Mgbako 2005:201). Originally, the official goal of *Ingando*, was to integrate and foster a sense of nationalism among Tutsi returnees who had fled Rwanda and been separated from their home country for many years. In 1999, NURC took over the management of solidarity camps, that until then had been administered by the ministry of youth, culture and sports.

Since the initial *Ingando* for Tutsi returnees, there have been separate government-run solidarity camps for students, politicians, church leaders, prostitutes, ex-soldiers, ex-combatants, genocidaires, *Gacaca* judges, women's organisation and others (Mgbako 2005:209). The NURC National Plan is for every Rwandan of majority age to attend *Ingando* at some point in his or her life. Rwandan students who complete secondary school are required to attend *Ingando* before they commence their university studies (Mgbako 2005:217). *Ingando* run from several days to several months, depending on the group participating, but in all of them the RPF-version of history is taught, and re-education regarding the ethnicity question in Rwanda is at the heart of the program. *Ingando* teaches its participants about Rwanda as a nation before colonialism, the damaging effects of colonialism, and the creation of "myths of difference" - "the myths of the oppressors" "the myths of the oppressed" and "myths of ethnicity" (Mgbako 2005:218). I will now describe how this RPF version of the history goes, that is taught in the solidarity camps and elsewhere in Rwanda.

6 Rewriting of History

In the following description of “Unity of Rwandans”, I will display the different parts of this story that contributes to the creation of a common identity. Especially meaningful parts will be quoted, in order to make my points clearer and to show how the story goes. Following this description I will analyse the meaning of the story deeper.

6.1 The Unity of Rwandans

The version of Rwandan history that the government is promoting is in short that before arrival of the White man, Rwandans lived in harmony, and felt love and compassion for each other for their country. Ethnical belonging was not of importance in pre-colonial Rwanda. Rather, people belonged to different clans which were shared between Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, or as it is written in this story: “If someone asked him his belonging he would immediately reply without any doubt that he was Umusinga, Umusindi, Umwega etc [clans in Rwanda]; he could not think that he was asked whether he was Twa, Tutsi or Hutu” (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 4). The people of Rwanda lived under their King, who was taking care of his people. However, with the arrival of the White man, this King was forced to rule according to the colonial administration, and could not protect his people anymore. The White people destroyed the unity of Rwandans, and divided people into different ethnic groups by introducing the identity cards. Rwandans were further separated by the White peoples’ introduction to their religion and educational system. This division that the White man forced upon Rwandans later led to the genocide.

The story begins with: “The truth from history is that before the Colonial period, there was a strong unity between Rwandans; no ethnical war took place between them before that year” (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 5). The story continues with focus on pre-colonial Rwanda, and the values of that time.

Unity was for all Rwandans: Hutus, Tutsis and Twas. They were making up all together what our ancestors called “the King’s People”. All of them also knew they were Rwandans, that Rwanda was their country, that nobody could say that he had the right to it more than others. Even though they said that Rwanda was belonging to the King, they ascertained that “the King was supported by the warriors”. (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 6.)

Rwanda was politically organised under the King before the arrival of the White man, and continued to be so during colonial period, but then with the

implementation of the colonial power's rules. This King and his people were later to be despised by the Hutus for bringing injustice and discriminating them. The government of today is however putting concentration of what this kingdom *really* was, from the start, before the arrival of the White man.

The king was the crux for all Rwandans. Poets called him Sebantu (the father of all people in Rwanda). And after he was enthroned, people said that "he was not Umututsi [tutsi] anymore" but the king for the people. And in their daily life, Hutus, Tutsis and Twas were familiar with the King. It was forbidden to keep somebody away because of his height or his colour: anyone who wanted could meet the king. In the programme of expanding Rwanda, there was no room for disputes between Hutus, Tutsis and Twas. The King brought all of them together to a watchword. (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 6.)

Not only did they share a common king who cared for all of them, Rwandans also shared a love for their country and for each other. There was no region for Hutus, no region for Tutsis or Twas. All of them had mixed housing, and they helped one another based on being neighbours, the story goes. Before the White People's arrival, Rwandans were united, a unity based on one king and patriotism, their common language, culture, and beliefs. But then something happened that abruptly changed the world of Rwandans; the White man's arrival.

When the White People came to Rwanda they took away the power from the King, and by their forced rule the king could no longer protect his people. They used the Tutsis for ruling and consequently the people had nobody to defend them. They had to respect new authorities, the main reason being that they were representing white people, and people were very afraid of the White man. He had different ways of punishing anybody who despised him. (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 13.)

Rwandans are described as victims, and the discrimination of Hutus in the past is through this story explained by the fact that also the Tutsis were victims to the colonization, and did not have another choice but obeying the colonial power.

White People's new way of governing was spread throughout the whole of Rwanda, the story tells us. The administration which was introduced by Belgians disturbed the unity of Rwandans, favoured one ethnic group, and "within that ethnic group only a few people were too much favoured, while the other big majority of Rwandans were too much oppressed" (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 14). This brings the story its difficult part of history; when the hatred between the two groups started.

We'd like to point out that until 1959, there was unity based on kingship; even though ethnic segregation had started. Once PARMEHUTU political party was born with its ethnic ideology, unity started to fade away seriously. Clashes among and exclusion of Rwandans were maintained openly and officially and were carried out through what was called "balance" whether in schools, in employment, and in the army. Ethnic segregation destroyed some

of Rwandan positive values, like solidarity which was based on: friendship, brotherhood/confraternity and clans. (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 56).

It is stated that PARMEHUTU brought divisions, but the story doesn't mention the discrimination of the Hutus before 1959, neither does it take up the violence and conflicts between Hutus and Tutsis before and after PARMEHUTU came to power. The part of history that divided the people is simple eclipsed in this story. It is just concluded that "the relationship between Hutus, Tutsis and Twas has become a conflict between the two ethnic groups: Tutsis and Hutus. As for Twas, they seem to have been completely forgotten". Those problems exists because of the past, it is stated, followed by "we cannot continue like this" (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 57). The origin of the different ethnic groups is determined, reminding people that anyone could be a Hutu or a Tutsi.

Being a Hutu or a Tutsi is to belong to a different wealth group, which also determines the kind of relationship existing between the two ethnic groups and is also reflected at the administral level. A well-off Hutu who would take a Tutsi girl as a wife was said to have cast off his being Hutu. An ethnic Tutsi who would grow poorer (there were many reasons for that: cows in bad shape, the fact of being dispossessed of one's cows) would become a Hutu. (The Unity of Rwandans 1999, p. 59.)

But people are still spreading false ideas of ethnic origin, which is nothing but a misunderstanding, this story states. Responsibility for this misunderstanding is again put on White people that started to spread the idea that Hutus and Tutsis have different origin

The responsibility of colonial rulers in Rwanda's misfortune is critical. Their role is critical but one cannot say it only triggered them. Colonialism brought about the breakaway between Hutus and Tutsis that affected their thinking schemes, and their deeds and activities. At the ideological level, colonial rulers worked together with missionaries to introduce and disseminate the ideology, already mentioned above, that Hutus, Tutsis and Twas have nothing in common, that those superior others must join white people and assist them in ruling the country and converting Banyarwanda [Rwanda] to Christianity.

In spite of all the bad things the White man forced Rwanda through, this story presents a solution of the problems of today and a good future, but first Rwandans have abolish the idea of ethnicity.

There is a lot one can say about the origins and social relationships between Batutsi [Tutsi], Hutus and Twas. Let us just take the following idea: Banyarwanda must understand that maintaining themselves prisoners of their belonging to ethnic Hutu, Tutsi and Twa group is one of the big obstacles standing their way to development. In fact, to remain prisoner of one's ethnic group without having any thing positive in mind, is like locking oneself up in a cave so that one cannot look outside. What matters is to live together peacefully, work together for

the development of their country, so that Banyarwanda can tackle and solve their common problems, and break their narcissisms and wake up to the progress the world has achieved.

6.2 Analyse of the Story

Collective identities are social constructions that often are created between “us” and “them”. Until recently in Rwanda, the own ethnic group constituted “us” while the other ethnic group constituted “them”. Opposed to that, this story is creating an imagination of a unity of Rwandans, where Hutus, Tutsis and Twas together form “us”, and the White people are forming the opposed “them”. To create a national identity it is important to create not only a “us” but also a “them”. Through identifying what we are not, we are also identifying what we are.

This story is bringing Rwanda back to its “roots”, with the underlying understanding that this is what Rwanda really was, and really is, but the White man destroyed the wonderful society Rwandans shared and turned it into a country of division and violence. One can see an underlying meaning that “we” should not behave like “them”, as we are not like them. The division of Rwandan people is hence a creation by “them” (the white people), and is therefore something that “we” (Rwandans) should not continue with.

Kane argues that national identities are built upon myths that can explain to people who they are, and who “the others” are and why the social relationships between the two groups look like they do (Kane 2000). This story includes those explanations, by describing to people why there has been a division between Hutus and Tutsis, and why the relationship between the two groups looks like it does, and the reasons to why the genocide took place.

This story also includes Rwandans in something more comprehensive than their individual life and the ethnic problems they have experienced. The story brings them back to their origin, their “true” culture, whom they really were, and to an imagination of Rwandan people as one. These explaining ingredients are conclusive for the construction of the national identity, since Rwandans as individuals and collectively become a united people by being located, and by locating themselves in the story (cf. Somers 1994:606). This story also arise strong feelings, like the pride of the Rwandan origin, and the beautiful society they once had, but also anger to how colonial powers destroyed this unity, that finally brought the atrocities of the genocide. Those collective feelings are important for the creation of a national identity, as it is something people share between them in connection to the nation (cf. Kane 2000:250). Another important thing this story does is that it renders both Hutus and Tutsis victims of the past and the genocide. In the colonial period Hutus and Tutsis are both described as victims to the ruling the colonial power forced upon them, and Tutsis are not held responsible for their acts of discrimination against Hutus. In the post-colonial time the ruling elite of PARMEHUTU is blamed for the atrocities that took place under their rule. Like this the difficult part of

blaming one party for the horrible events the people have experienced is escaped. It also creates collective victimhood for the people, and constitutes another common feeling that people can unite in, which is opposing them to the White people that victimized them.

One part of history is eclipsed in this story, that is the part in which Rwandans were divided and where hostility between Hutus and Tutsis took place. This part of the history would invite people to think of each other as separated groups, and does not go in line with the unity that the government wants to establish between Rwandans. In the same vein, Stanley Cohen explains that what is chosen to be forgotten, and what is chosen to be remembered, is something that must have a future, something that will work in a common world, in people's life-world (Cohen 2001:138). Rwanda cannot afford another conflict, and people do not want to experience the atrocities that took place in the past again. Accordingly to Stanley's suggestion, this story is creating an imagination of Rwandans as a united people that can live peacefully with each other, and through that Rwandans are offered a future, an imagination of a peaceful Rwanda where people live in harmony with each other, which Rwandans are in need for today (see Buckley-Zistel 2006).

Jane Elliot calls the end of a story the critical part, because it is the ending that determines the meaning of the actions and events within the narrative. In other words "the audience wants to know not only what happens next but what this all is leading to, what it all means" (Elliot 2005:12). This story ends with the conclusion that "we" (Rwandans) cannot continue to do what "they" (White people) forced us into. Instead the freedom and peace that existed in Rwanda before the colonial period has to be found again.

The story present ethnic belonging as an imprisonment. The opposed option to this imprisonment is the freedom of living peacefully and united with a common Rwandan identity. The common goals for the nation that the story puts forward are to live in peace, fight poverty and reach the "progress the world has achieved". White people are no longer ruling in Rwanda, there is no reason to continue the division that they introduced and forced upon the country. The pre-colonial society is romanticised as the good way for Rwandans to live, and finding back to the values and customs of that time would be helpful in order to achieve the goals of the nation.

7 Making one Nation one People

So far I have described how the rewriting of the history strive to construct a national identity among the Rwandans, through its myths and calling for common values, and through “forgetting” or eclipsing what separates people. I will now describe how this story is brought out in the Rwandan society, and how this is contributing to the constructing a national identity.

7.1 The story in the public

As earlier pointed out, Hutus and Tutsis have different recollections of the past. This poses problems for the government. Due to the difficulties of how to represent the past, and in order not to create thoughts of division among Rwandans, modern Rwandan history is not taught in schools (Mamdani 2001:267, Obura 2003:98-105). There is, in other words, not official version of the history available. *Ingando* is the only forum in which history is currently taught in Rwanda (Mamdani 2001:267). However NURC is also creating reconciliation clubs in the schools throughout the country, in which the unity in pre-colonial Rwanda is taught. Participation in those clubs is compulsory (CNUR 2005), and the pupils are urged to teach their parents the importance of reconciliation. Further, In public community meetings, radio broadcasts and events, which are frequently organized by NURC, Rwandans are also urged to reconcile with each other and to live with each other peacefully, and the unity of Rwandans before colonisation is recalled (Buckley-Zistel, 2006:142). All references to Hutu, Tutsi and Twa have been replaced by an all-inclusive “Rwandanness” in the public discourse, as the government has outlawed references to ethnicity within the national discourse (Mamdani 2001:220).

The Rwandan government is through their stories trying to construct a new identity among its citizens, and they are making sure they reach people on different levels of society, as the examples above show. “There is a persuasiveness and strength of the State Apparatus, with the reach to engage with all the Rwandans in the country”, Eugenia Zorbas writes (2004:38). She also points out that there is no independent civil society in Rwanda, and nothing that opposes the government’s version of the history. Media is following the same line as the government, as they are controlled by the government and do not have much of choice (Mamdani 2001:219). Consequently, Rwandans are fed with the same story in the public domain, as no opposed story gets any space.

Media is, as Alexa Robertson observes, very important for our identity construction. The role of the media is to make sure that people can identify with the dominated political community in which they make part (Robertson 2003:92).

Media is in this perspective very powerful. Robertson further argues that media has the power to decide what part of reality you will take part of, and what they choose not to show you will probably never know. Robertson is making a comparison to a museum, saying that when you go to a museum there are things you might not understand, and certain things that you might not see or notice, but, she points out, you will never be able to see the things that are not shown, nor will you remember what you never were shown (Robertson 2003:98). In this way the Rwandan government is limiting the collective memory to their own version, as other versions are excluded. As consequence there is no other possible forms of collective memories in Rwanda. Accordingly there is no other way of forming the Rwandan nationality, as the imagined national identity is made up by a collective memory (cf. Somers 1994:617).

Following the romanticizing of the past, the government is implementing what they call old traditions, like *Gacaca* and *Ingando*, to the contemporary society. *Gacaca* is a court system in which genocidaires are judged by their community, and anyone from the community who has something to say about the accused person is free to do so, after which the sentence is given. This court has evolved from traditional cultural law enforcement. *Ingando* is also claimed to be an updated version of a Rwandan tradition, that in its original form was a process in which elders of a community would leave the distractions of their daily lives and retreat to places of isolation to solve problems of national concern (Mandani 2000:208). At *Ingando* “graduating ceremonies” to which officials and the press are invited, the participants perform traditional dances for the audience, give speeches about their happiness at having been able to take part in the *Ingando* and how they look forward to return to their communes of origin (Zorbas 2004:39). Those old traditions are in the public discourse presented as a way of solving some of the nation’s problems. Imaginations and reconstructions of history and culture are used to form the Rwandan nationality and to form a collective memory of their beautiful past.

Traditional dance, the flag, new national symbols and the new national anthem are also promoting love for Rwanda and the values of the country. The opening of the new National museum, showing Rwandan traditional belongings, is also a way of creating and enforce the collective memory that the rewriting of history is emphasizing. The genocide memorial sites are being part of this nation building process as well, reminding people what happened because of the division of Hutu and Tutsi, followed by “never again” (never to let genocide happen again) and the importance of unity. Those memorial sites as well as the national mourning day, are fostering collective memory of the past.

In short, the rewriting of Rwandan history is implemented in the Rwandan society in different ways. *Ingando*, *Gacaca*, monuments, memorial sites and museums are “institutional embodiments of collective memory” to put in it Zorbas' words (2004:38). This implementation of the government's story in the society is strengthening the collective memory and the national identity that the government is trying to create.

7.2 The Need to Forget

As earlier described, the conflicts and hostility between Hutus and Tutsis has a long history including a lot of violence. The interplay between ethnic realities and their subjective reconstruction by political entrepreneurs has always been central to the Hutu - Tutsi conflict (Lemarchard 1994:588). Ethnic belonging has over time become very important for Rwandans, and Hutus' and Tutsis' different recollections of the past has played a devastating role in post-colonial Rwanda, finally leading to the genocide. (Buckley-Zistel 2006:131).

The story of a common origin and the quest for common identity that the government is promoting are new to Rwandans, and might therefore be complicated to achieve. But at the same time, coming to terms with the past is necessary for Rwandans.

Hutus and Tutsis live side by side in Rwanda today; they share the same working field, live in the same villages, and their children go to school together. The population is not separated as in many other countries where ethnic conflict has taken place. Perpetrators of the genocide and its victims meet every day, and share daily activities and the everyday life. There is therefore a need to find means to live peacefully, side by side.

In order to escape the grip of the past, people eclipse it. This is not a denial of what happened, but deliberate coping mechanism. Only through “forgetting” are people of Rwanda able to cope with their present social milieu in the proximity of killers who participated in the genocide, Buckley-Zistel explains (2006:146).

There is an awareness in the recounting of the Rwandan history, and that awareness is to forget an uncomfortable part of the history, and remember the beautiful part of it. Collective identity is not merely produced through remembering but also through forgetting, Cohen suggests (2001:138). The past is remembered as harmonious and peaceful, with the genocide being a sudden rupture which took everybody by surprise, and the pre-genocide government is often blamed for the massacres of 1994. By doing so Rwandans are, as earlier pointed out, forming a collective identity in victim hood, which also includes the perpetrators, rendering Rwandans collectively innocent (Buckley-Zistel 2006:140). Through not referring to underlying social cleavages, they reduce the impact of divisions, which is essential for surviving and it allows peaceful coexistence. “Rwanda’s society is highly diverse, reflecting various experiences of the genocide as victims or participants, bystander, absentee or saviour. In addition, in present memory, some aspects – most notable past tensions of Hutu and Tutsi – are eclipsed from the discourse”, Buckley-Zistel writes (2006:131).

Buckley-Zistel’s research shows that the Rwandan government’s version of the past and its calling for collective forgetting serves a function to the people, which makes the life they share side by side bearable. People with completely different experiences of the past live closely together, and this requires some form of cohesion. As a consequence the past is distorted. People do not want to remember what cause the genocide, even though the events of the genocide might not be something they can forget. Rwandans therefore tend to accept this rewriting of

history to a certain extent. This collective forgetting is a way to go on with life and live with each other peacefully.

8 Conclusion

The Rwandan government is trying to construct a new identity among its citizens through recounting the past in a certain way suitable for the purpose of creating one people and one nation, or “Erase ethnicity for the sake of the nation”, as Mamdani puts it (2001: 219). To create a national identity, what unites people has to be underlined, and what separates them has to be ignored. In the case of Rwanda this means underlining the unity of Rwandans before colonisation, and eclipsing the division of the people during and after colonisation. A national identity is constructed by reshaping people’s identities, and this reshaping takes place through the “creation” of a collective memory.

The collective memory is made up by a process of selective appropriation where events are being related to each other, not chronologically, but in a thematic way in order to give meaning to the nation itself and its origin (Somers 1994:617). Collective memory of Rwanda is built upon the story of a common origin, and harmonious society before the arrival of the White people. This story is selectively appropriated and emplotted in order to establish meaning, purpose and unity among the people who otherwise have very different reoccupations of the past.

The collective memory is strengthened through memorial sites and national museums. The story of Rwanda is recalled on commemorations of the genocide and on the national days, and its frequency in the media is making sure people are reminded of their origin. The return to traditional culture such as traditional dance is being encouraged in the public sphere, and old political (reconstructed) traditions such as *Ingando* and *Gacaca* are used in the society. This is a way of returning to the society that Rwanda once was, and encourage a national identity in accordance with the government's story of the past. The Rwandan government is in this way, through their stories, national symbols, and practices constructing collective memory and shared beliefs.

The public story of Rwanda is telling people about their place, their heritage, who they are and where they are going. This public narrative that the Rwandan government is introducing will hence constitute a part of the Rwandan people’s way of locating themselves in the world, locate others around them, and locate themselves in relationship to those others. As Somers argues, we build our identities upon the resources we find around us. People constitute identities by locating themselves or being located within stories, which are constituted through narratives. “All of us come to be who we are by being located or locating ourselves in social narratives rarely out of our own making” Somers clarifies (1994:606). Locating oneself in a story means that a person has to engage in that story, Kane is further explaining. When a person hears or reads a story he or she is demanded to participate in this story, in one way or another (2000:249).

Important to notice is also that Rwandans not have access to any other version of the history, nor any opposition to the national identity the Rwandan government is promoting. The stories in which they can locate themselves is therefore very limited, and gives the Rwandan government monopoly on the creation of this collective memory and national identity. How people in Rwanda accept and reproduce this national identity promoted from above is however not something I cannot answer from this material, and my intention was never to do so. But Buckley-Zistel (2006) is through her article inviting us to think that the imagination of that there once was a unity between Rwandans, and “forgetting” the violent past, is a way for Rwandans to make the reality in which they live bearable.

This study shows that the government in Rwanda is trying to form a national identity of unity through its stories, symbols and (invented) traditions frequently recalled in the public sphere. The rewriting of history and the implementation of the story in the society is creating a collective memory, and it is demanding the Rwandan population to locate and engage in the story that is including them, their history, their life and their future. This will therefore play in with people’s comprehension of their life, place and past, in one way or another.

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