Rwanda, Rwandans and Rwandanness

How the official government discourse and local narratives on Rwanda's
history influence youth's theatre plays in Kigali and Nyamata town

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Ahari ubushake haba hari uboshobozi

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Introduction

> "But that land is now a whole new destination. Once beaten down and trodden, once hidden beneath the ashes driven down too deep, there was no lower she could go. And now that motherland stands tall with a grace familiar with limitation. […] Rwanda chose to stay alive when she had the chance to let herself die" (Muhoza 2016).

Rwanda. Land of a thousand hills. It is this description that seems to give Rwanda a magical image. Undeniably, some of the country's magnificent views over its many hills can make you feel like living a fairytale, while simultaneously they can make you tend to forget the history those hills have, the cruelties they have seen, the many bodies they shelter, and the secrets they hide. From April to July 1994, Rwanda was shaken by a genocide that left roughly one million people dead. A defining character of the genocide was that it was highly personal: neighbors, friends, relatives and even spouses turned into each other's enemies as they betrayed or even killed each other. It is needless to say that, apart from the one million deaths that the genocide caused, the social tissue of the Rwandan society was completely laid to waste in these one hundred days.

Following the end of the genocide, the government of Rwanda (GoR) immediately put a major emphasis on rebuilding the nation. Not only in terms of repairing infrastructure, houses and buildings, but also in terms of mending the social and communal ties the genocide has destroyed. On the one hand, it brought (alleged) genocide perpetrators to justice – either through criminal courts or through *gacaca* (community-based justice mechanisms). On the other hand, it has sought to unite the Rwandan population through truth-telling, and through implementing some strict policies and regulations (United Nations 2014). As to the latter, given the fact that ethnicity and ethnic manipulation had been key to the genocide, the government's main aim has been to *de-ethnicize* the country. That is, it denies that ethnicity or ethnic difference existed in the past, or exist in the present (Purdovoká 2008: 3). This *de-ethnicization* finds its way amongst others in a rewriting of the country's history, a revised education curriculum, and the criminalization of genocide ideology and divisionism (Hintjens 2008; Purdeková 2008). It seems that, as illustrated by the poem-excerpt above, those measures have brought about significant steps forward. According to the Rwanda Governance Scorecard, which measures the governance performance, 80.58 percent of the Rwandan population was said to be reconciled (Rwanda Governance Board 2014: 6). This claim is amplified by the fact that people nowadays share the same neighborhoods, the same schools, the same churches, and the same bars. Intermarriages are resurfacing and mixed friendships are (re)built (Buckley-Zistel 2006a). If one compares this situation to the one in post-war Bosnia-Hercegovina for example, where ethnic antagonism seems to structure society, Rwanda in fact seems to do quite well (Kunovich and Hodson 2005).

Different scholars however, have a less optimistic view. They argue that the government's de-ethnicization approach may have led to superficial unity, but not to the long desired or proclaimed

reconciliation. The argument goes that, by denying that ethnicity exists in Rwanda, the past and present lived experiences of the Rwandan population are negated or ignored. Whereas the GoR aims to impose a layer of "Rwandanness" on the population, it appears that on the ground ethnic identities are still a defining feature in people's daily lives. Yet, these ethnicities are largely kept to oneself and hidden from plain view (Buckley-Zistel 2006b; Thomson 2011; Ingelaere 2009). Whereas some authors argue that this quelling of ethnicity helps the local population cooperating with each other on a daily basis (Buckley-Zistel 2006a), other authors argue that ignoring or prohibiting ethnicity may lead to more social tensions and unaddressed grievances (Hintjens 2008; Thomson 2010; Reyntjens 2010). Underlying these arguments is the common assumption that the Rwandan population can be considered a homogeneous entity. In their analyses often no distinction is made between age, gender, background or geographical location. Their work gives the idea that the whole Rwandan society is a stage, where all people mask their ethnicity, but secretly cherish still them. Helen Berents and Siobhan McEvoy-Levy (2015) however, argue that age (along with class, race, and gender) matter for the extent to which people engage in peace- or nation-building. While the authors acknowledge that people operate in certain structures and discourses that may impede or foster peace- or nation-building processes, they also stress that youth in particular is able to counter these structures. Special emphasis is put on the role of popular culture and social media here; art and music may for example strongly reject certain values and policies.

This thesis therefore aims to unravel how the official government discourse and local narratives on Rwanda's history affect the content of theatre plays performed by youth theatre groups in Kigali and Nyamata town between June and August 2016. Central to this research question is the concept of *nation-building*, which is understood here as follows: "The formation and establishment of the new state itself as a political entity and the processes of creating viable degrees of unity, adaptation, achievement, and a sense of national identity among the people" (Bell and Freeman 1974: 11). This definition thus identifies nation-building with unifying different entity groups and breeding a feeling of national unity. This research thus analyzes how the government discourse on Rwanda's history breeds such national unity among the Rwandan population. However, a distinction between the official government discourses and local narratives is made. According to Robert Brubaker et al. (2006: 12-14), political nationalist rhetoric is not necessarily congruent with everyday experiences.

The methodology used to answer the central research question builds on a discursive approach, which holds that people are born into specific discourses – into societies that are organized along certain rules of social life. These discourses are created and maintained through words such as speech-acts or newspapers, but also through actions, thoughts, beliefs, logics and rules. Departing from this point of view, the discursive approach seeks to identify how reality (discourse) and social boundaries are (de)constructed (Sayyid and Zac 1998). Important to mention is that some groups or institutions behold strong social power and therefore have quite exclusive access to, and control over, specific discourses. They can deliberately emphasize or ignore specific actions or events, and as such distort reality (Van Dijk 2001).

In order to answer the central question, this thesis first identifies the dominant discourse on the pre- and post-genocide society in Rwanda, and the 1994 genocide that the GoR seeks to spread among the Rwandan population. The analysis is based on academic literature on nation-building in post-genocide Rwanda. Second, it examines how this dominant discourse resonates with the past and present experiences and narratives of the Rwandan population. In doing so, it uses academic literature, interviews with different (non)governmental organizations working on peace- and nation-building in Rwanda, and focus groups with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali and Nyamata town. Third, on the basis of these focus groups, the thesis seeks to identify how both the official government discourse and the local narratives are reflected in the theatre plays that these youths perform. Analyzing the nation-building process in Rwanda as a top-down as well as bottom-up process, might foster a better and more detailed understanding of the feeling of national unity that nowadays (does not) exist among different entity groups in Rwanda. It may provoke further analyses that go beyond treating the Rwandan society as a homogeneous, agency-deprived entity, that is only at the receiving end of the nation-building processes implemented by the Rwandan government. The research is socially relevant too, for the nation-building project so far has mostly focused on denying the existence of ethnicity and ethnic antagonism. The skimpy result is that the ethnic-question has been quelled in public, but continues to play a significant role in the private realm. Ironically, this measure seems to undermine the nation-building project. Therefore, a better understanding of the everyday importance of ethnicity should be established, so that the nation-building process in the country can possibly be more successful in the future.

The first chapter of this thesis gives a brief and non-extensive overview of the pre- and post-genocide society, and the causes and dynamics of the 1994 genocide. The second chapter then discusses the academic debate on nationalism and nation-building and its shortcomings more in detail, and explains the approach and added value of this thesis. This is followed by a chapter on the research methodology. The fourth chapter then seeks to unravel the narrative on the pre- and post-genocide society in Rwanda, and the genocide itself, that the GoR spreads. Attention is paid both to what *is* and *is not* included in this narrative. The fifth chapter then analyzes how the discourse spread by the GoR resonates with the past experiences and lived realities in Rwanda. The sixth chapter finally examines how both the official government discourse and the local narratives are reflected in theatre plays performed by youth in Kigali and Nyamata town. The thesis ends with a conclusion and discussion on the major findings of this research.

Chapter 1. Historical overview: From coexistence to genocide[1]

For decades, Rwanda has been home to three ethnic groups: the Hutus, the Tutsis, and the Twa. Philip Gourevitch (1998) sets forth that in precolonial Rwanda the three ethnic groups lived peacefully together, and often intermarried. Yet, different scholars highlight that still clan, class and client networks (and disputes between or within them) were the most defining features of loyalty those days. Also, the then kingdom was characterized by a stark hierarchy with important class distinctions and social inequalities, and political abuse and political murders were not uncommon (Newbury 2001; Purdevoká 2008). In general, Tutsis enjoyed great political and financial power, Hutus were vassals and the Twa were hunter-gatherers (Gourevitch 1998). The distinction between especially Hutus and Tutsis was however not as static as this description suggests. Catherine Newbury (1998: 10) highlights that relationships between the two ethnic groups varied: "In some areas, significant numbers of Tutsi and Hutu lived similar lifestyles, keeping cattle and cultivating their field – many Hutu (but not all) in precolonial Rwanda owned cattle, and many Tutsi (but not all) practiced agriculture." Simultaneously, influential Hutus could just as much as Tutsis work at the royal court (Newbury 1998). Therefore it is argued that in pre-colonial times, ethnicity and ethnic boundaries were fluid.

The arrival of Belgian colonizers in 1918 however, heralded an era of *reification* of ethnicity.[2] On the basis of measures of physical features, European anthropologists concluded that the three ethnic groups in Rwanda were actually distinct population groups: the Hutus (Bantu), Tutsis (Hamit) and the Twa (Pygmoid) (Buckley-Zistel 2009). The Belgian colonizers now classified all Rwandans in terms of ethnicity, and registered their ascribed ethnicities in identity cards. As Tutsis allegedly had physical resemblance to Europeans, the Belgians selected them as the superior race and reinforced the Tutsis' monopoly on administrative and political jobs, while subjecting Hutus to forced labor such as road construction (Gourevitch 1998). It would be unfair to only blame the Belgian colonizers for the destruction of the social fabric, as Rwandan chiefs, poets and historians at the royal court helped reify this ethnic distinction. However, it is beyond doubt that colonialism had a detrimental impact on the social, political and economic composition of the country. Ever since their arrival, ethnicity became the defining feature of Rwandan existence, and "with every schoolchild reared in the doctrine of racial superiority and inferiority, the idea of a collective national identity was steadily laid to waste, and on either side of the Hutu-Tutsi divide there developed mutually exclusionary discourses based on the competing claims of entitlement and injury" (Gourevitch 1998: 57-58). Whereas Tutsis started to believe that they were indeed a superior race, feelings of inferiority and resentment among Hutus steadily increased (Buckley-Zistel 2006b; 2009). However, when Tutsi elite started to demand independence late

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[1] It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the causes and dynamics of the 1994 genocide in detail. Those have been extensively discussed in both academia and popular media. See for example Gourevitch (1998). This chapter does not claim to depict *truth* of what happened in Rwanda. It is based on what previous academic research has disclosed in the past two decades. Undoubtedly there are still facts and figures that remain disclosed up to the present day.

[2] Reification of ethnicity means that ethnicity is portrayed as something natural and inherent, rather than the product of people's actions and identifications. As such, ethnicity gets "the [false] appearance of being an autonomous factor in the ordering of the social word", and ethnic boundaries are perceived as insurmountable (Baumann 1999: 62-63).

1950s, the Belgian colonizers turned the social system upside down. Hutus now became the political elite in the country, and soon started to introduce anti-Tutsi policies and propaganda. Politicians and media argued that Tutsis were foreign immigrants, and that Rwanda had to be returned to its rightful owner, that is, the Hutus. This rhetoric was also incorporated in the educational curricula. For instance, teachers would refer to Tutsis by calling them snakes or cockroaches. Also, mathematics would sometimes be taught in terms of killing Tutsis: "If I have three Tutsis and I kill two, how many Tutsis are left?" (Ndahimana 2016). This discrimination and dehumanization continued for decades, and caused thousands of Tutsis to flee.

Already in the 1960s some of these refugees began attacking the Hutu-dominated government to regain government power, but it was not until 1 October 1990 that they started an insurgency on Rwandan soil under the name "Rwandan Patriotic Front" (RPF). For many Hutus, this insurrection felt like a foreign invasion, which made discourses about the "Hamit infiltration of the Bantu country" and discriminatory practices against the Tutsis flare (Newbury 1998; Buckley-Zistel 2006b; Buckley-Zistel 2009; Mafeza 2013). The level of hatespeech and dehumanization increased in the run up to the 1994 genocide. Politicians, teachers, and different media channels called the Hutus to take up arms against the Tutsis and expel them from the country in whatever way. The high ethnic tensions that had been shimmering in Rwanda for decades, finally came to an outburst when Habyiramana's plane, the then president of Rwanda, was shot down on 6 April 1994. On 7 April 1994 mass killings broke out, which would only end mid-July 1994, causing the death of about one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Gourevitch 1998). The RPF eventually defeated the Hutu government and *Interahamwe* mid-July 1994, and took over power. Filip Reyntjens (2010) sets forth that Hutu elites soon became the victims of harassment, imprisonment and physical elimination. Also, refugee camps in eastern Zaire were repeatedly attacked by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) – the military wing of the RPF. These camps sheltered hundreds of thousands of people (mostly Hutu) that had fled during and after the genocide and refused to return home out of fear for reprisals. Simultaneously, the camps functioned as bases for guerilla attacks against western Rwanda. The RPF therefore resorted to a tactic of destroying these camps, forcing many refugees to return to Rwanda or flee further into eastern Zaire. Allegedly, RPF soldiers hunted down those refugees for months, attacking their small encampments and massacring men, women and children at will. While only five percent of the refugee population was suspected to have been guilty of genocide, the vast majority of the people that had to bear the brunt, seemed to be innocent (Newbury 1998).

Chapter 2. Theoretical framework

In both academia and media much attention has been paid to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the post-genocide situation in the country. Many authors and scientists have sought to unravel the level and intensity of unity and reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis in modern-day Rwanda. Whereas some have focused on the role of restorative and retributive justice in bringing perpetrators and victims closer together, others have focused on the effect of the nation-building practices that the GoR has set in motion since the end of the genocide. It is the latter focus that this thesis build and elaborates on. This chapter now gives an overview the theories, and their shortcomings, that are most dominant in the academic debate on nation-building and nationalism.

2.1 Nationalism as the cause of violence

Benedict Anderson (1991) and Anthony Smith (1996) seem to be two of the most influential authors that have written about nations and nationalism. The first scholar argues that a nation is nothing more than "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (1991: 6). First, the community is imagined because its member will never meet or get to know the majority of their fellow members. Second, the nation is imagined as limited because nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation. Third, the nation is imagined as sovereign because it dreams of being free. Fourth, nations are imagined as a community because they are conceived as an equal and egalitarian comradeship. According to Anderson, the most important factor for the rise of nationalism was the invention of print-technology and print capitalism in the sixteenth century. For example, the newspaper brought some sense of unity among the community. Not only because people became more aware of what happened in their surroundings, but also because there were standard times to read the newspaper. The thought of reading the same newspaper along with thousands of others at the same time, strengthened the idea of a community (Anderson 1991).

Smith (1996) too, emphasizes the importance of books and novels in the rise of nationalism. However, simultaneously he clings to a more primordialist view by stating that the potential for nationalism is always present, as "no culture that we have ever encountered can flourish without collective memories and traditions, neither can cultural identities and communities exist without their distinctive symbolic codes" (Smith 1996: 582). The diversity of ethnic nationalism can nevertheless only be explained by examining its "deep resources", that is, ethno-history, ethnic election, and sacred territories. The first refers to (idealized) collective memories: it defines what is (not) to be admired, and instigates the feeling for a restoration to a former glorious state. This is linked to a collective destiny, which justifies all the sacrifices that citizens may be asked to make for this destiny. The second concerns popular mobilization and sanctification. Communities might perceive themselves as a 'chosen people' with a sacred mission. The third are certain geographical areas that are felt to be crucial in past experiences of a collectivity, and which have therefore through myth-making and shared histories become sacred (Smith 1996).

Anderson and Smith explain how feelings of nationalism have surfaced in the modern world, but they both fail to explain *at which particular moments* in the modern world nationalist movements actually arise. The sudden rise of nationalism in former Yugoslavia for example (Glenny 1996), cannot be accredited to the rise of print-capitalism in the sixteenth century, nor to ever-present deep resources. It seems that nationalistic feelings need a specific trigger to blossom. Ingo Schröder and Bettani Schmidt's (2001) theory on *violent imaginaries* seeks to answer this question. The authors argue that elites in a society can talk masses into a certain discourse that legitimizes violence or war. By spreading violent imaginaries – narratives, performances or inscriptions emphasizing the historicity of present-day confrontations – violence becomes conceivable and imaginable for people. History is thus used to create in-group unity and out-group hostility. On a similar note, James Fearon and David Laitin (2000) find that identity groups are socially constructed either by elites or masses, in their efforts to grab political power or through their everyday interaction. These socially constructed groups and group boundaries can eventually be misused to mobilize people for war.

2.2 Nationalism as the root of unity

The majority of academic literature that has been written on nation-building and nationalism in the past twenty years, has mostly treated nationalism as a phenomenon that can been used to mobilize people into violence or war (Bauman 1999; Fearon and Laitin 2000; Oberschall 2000; Schröder and Schmidt 2001; Grigorian and Kaufman 2007). Less attention has been paid to the way nation-building practices and nationalism can actually lead to unity and reconciliation. Béatrice Pouligny (2005) and Sarah Buckley-Zistel (2009) however, do. The first puts forward that "wars destroy not only buildings and bodies but also trust, hope, identity, family and social ties" (Pouligny 2005: 496). In other words: political and social culture and codes of conduct of individuals and communities – the bricks of the *imagined community* – are affected by violent conflict too. In the aftermath of war or genocide, governments or authorities are therefore challenged to foster a sense of unity and nationalism amongst their populations. Buckley-Zistel (2009: 32) highlights that a significant part of these so called *unification policies* – "top-down efforts to influence the relationship between parties to a conflict in order to create a collective identity" – concerns spreading and implementing a specific narrative about the past. This narrative is not necessarily representative of what actually happened: uncomfortable events may for instance be deliberately forgotten, while minor achievements may be glorified. All-in-all, such processes may thus lead to unity and nationalism.

Buckley-Zistel's (2009) understanding of unification largely departs from an elite-mass perspective, assuming that masses automatically come to follow the rhetoric of elites and act accordingly. Yet, Brubaker et al. (2006: 12-14) argue against such top-down theorization of nationalism, by underscoring the *duality of nationhood and nationalism.* This holds that political rhetoric can discipline masses into certain categories and behaviors through discourse and rules and regulations, but that simultaneously nationalism has to be felt in and fed by lived experiences – which is not necessarily always the case.

Politics and everyday experiences may thus be incongruent or contradictory. In this line of thought, Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond (2013: 764) emphasize that levels of peace and cooperation may differ per village: "At all levels there are subjects exercising their agency for peace or against it, doing their best to maintain a viable everyday existence in the face of governmentalism […] and structural power." Examining nationalism from top-down as well as bottom-up, can thus illustrate the discrepancy between political rhetoric and everyday experiences. This approach still risks drawing a too generalized picture of society though, as it does not take into account the heterogeneity of a society. Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) in contrast, emphasize that age, class, race, and gender are some of the factors that define why or to what extent people (do not) engage in peace- and nation-building. The authors argue that youths in particular can initiate change by rejecting or promoting certain values and policies, and can spread feelings of peace and nationalism – for example through popular culture.

Both in academia and the media a lot has been written on the way the GoR seeks to implement a specific discourse on Rwanda's history in order to foster national unity among the Rwandan population (Buckley-Zistel 2006b; Hintjens 2008). However, barely any attention has been paid to the way the population copes with this discourse. In case this does actually receive attention, often differences in age, gender, class or race are not taken into account. Drawing on Brubaker et. al's (2006) theory on the duality of nationhood and nationalism, this thesis therefore seeks to unravel how the official government discourse and local narratives on Rwanda's history affect the content of theatre plays performed by youth theatre groups in Kigali and Nyamata town. In order to answer this question, the this research focuses on the following three sub questions:

1. What is the official discourse on the pre- and post-genocide society in Rwanda, and the 1994 genocide, that the government of Rwanda seeks to spread?
2. How does the official discourse that the government spreads, relate to the lived experiences and narratives of the population in Rwanda?
3. How are the official government discourse and the local narratives reflected in the youth theatre plays in Kigali and Nyamata town?

The next chapter elaborates on the research design, the data collection, and the limitations of the research.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Having set forth the main research question and the sub questions of this thesis, this chapter now gives more detail on the design and the data collection of the research that was conducted. In addition, attention is paid to the limitations of this research.

3.1 Research design

The methodology of this research draws on a discursive approach, which holds that people are born into specific discourse, that is, societies that are organized along certain rules of social life. These discourses are created and maintained through words such as speech-acts or newspapers, but also through actions, thoughts, beliefs, logics and rules. Departing from this point of view, the discursive approach seeks to identify how reality (discourse) and social boundaries are (de)constructed through words, actions, beliefs, thoughts, logics, and rules (Sayyid and Zac 1998). Groups or institutions that possess strong social power, may have more control specific discourses. They can distort reality by emphasizing or ignoring specific actions or events (Van Dijk 2001). Obviously discourse plays a large role in Brubaker et al.'s (2006) theory on the duality of nationhood and nationalism The fundamental premise of this theory, is that political rhetoric can make masses internalize a certain discourse, which may foster a feeling of national unity. However, simultaneously the people have the agency to choose to what extent they will internalize this discourse. If for example the political rhetoric and lived experiences of the population seem to be largely incongruent, people are less likely to gratuitously copy the political rhetoric. This thesis therefore pays attention to the official discourse that the government seeks to spread, and how this discourse resonates with the lived experiences and local narratives of the Rwandan population.

In order to identify the official government discourse, this thesis draws on Schröder and Schmidt's (2001) framework on violent imaginaries. The authors argue that elites can legitimize violence, and can make war imaginable, by spreading violent imaginaries – narratives, performances or inscriptions that emphasizing the historicity of present-day confrontations. This thesis turns Schröder and Schmidt's theory around and examines how *peaceful imaginaries* - narratives, performances or inscriptions emphasizing history in order to create peace and unity – foster a sense of unity and make future cooperation imaginable. Local narratives of course do not find expression in such explicit ways. As the next two chapters will show, these narratives are often even limited to the private realm. In order to discover them, semi-structured interviews were held with different organizations working on peace- and nation-building in Rwanda. At the time of writing, they were doing research or working on different levels of society, and with different segments of society. Therefore, they are considered to be have a good insight into the local struggles in Rwanda.

In order to avoid falling in the same trap as other authors did, that is, not paying attention how age, gender, race and class influence the extent to which someone will engage in peace- and nation-building practices (Berents and McEvoy-Levy 2015), this thesis has done a case study on youth theatre

groups in Kigali and Nyamata town. The goal of this case study was to find out how the official government discourse and local narratives are reflected in these theatre plays. As such, the focus groups also added to the information that the organizations mentioned above had given on (the influence of) local experiences and narratives. In addition to the focus groups, more background information on the role of youth in post-conflict nation-building was gained by attending a six day-youth conference organized by Aegis Trust. During this conference, youths from sixteen different countries discussed issues such as fighting ethnic hatred, genocide ideology, and post-war reconstruction. The conference gave a valuable insight into some of the struggles that the Rwandan post-genocide generation faces.

3.2 Data collection

This thesis partly draws on literature on peace- and nation-building in post-genocide Rwanda, written by academics as well as practitioners working on these topics in Rwanda. As indicated above, this thesis is also based on social research that was carried out between June and August 2016.

3.2.1 Interviews with (non)governmental organizations

In order to get an insight into the current social situation in Rwanda, semi-structured interviews were held with different governmental institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of peace- and nation-building in Rwanda. These are National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG), Never Again Rwanda (NAR), Aegis Trust and Community-Based Sociotherapy Program (CBSP). CNLG is a national organization that seeks to prevent and fight against genocide and genocide ideology, and to overcome their consequences. The organization is at the forefront of coordinating the annual commemoration period in Rwanda (National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide, n.d.). Together with NGO Radio La Benevolencija, CNLG has done research on the prevalence of hate-speech within families throughout the country, which is used for this thesis. NAR is an independent human rights and peacebuilding organization that aims to empower Rwandans to analyze the root causes of conflict and facilitate dialogue on sustainable peace and socio-economic development (Never Again Rwanda, n.d.). Aegis Trust is an international nongovernmental organization that works to prevent genocide and mass atrocities worldwide, amongst others through research, advocacy and peace education. Also, they help survivors of atrocities rebuild their lives. In Rwanda, Aegis Trust manages the Genocide Archive of Rwanda and runs the Kigali Genocide Memorial. As such, they are one of the most prominent organizations working on peacebuilding in post-genocide Rwanda (Aegis Trust, n.d.). Finally, CBSP is a three year-initiative implemented in every province of Rwanda, in order to improve psycho-social well-being and strengthen interpersonal reconciliation and social cohesion at the grass-roots level in Rwanda (Community-Based Sociotherapy Program, n.d.). The interview with CBSP was used to get an grassroots-perspective on the prevalence of hate-speech within families, and the level of reconciliation in the country. Combining literature review with interviews with Rwandan governmental institutions and NGOs working on peace- and

nation-building in Rwanda was considered very useful for this research. On the one hand, it gave an insight into the discourse on Rwanda's history and its current situation that the GoR seeks to spread; on the other hand, it provided information on the local experiences and narratives of the Rwandan population. Also, the organizations helped preparing the focus groups with the youths in Kigali and Nyamata town. For one, Aegis Trust helped to coordinate the focus groups. Also, as the GoR proclaimed after the 1994 genocide that every inhabitant of Rwanda was now "Rwandan" instead of Hutu, Tutsi or Twa (Reyntjens 2010). This makes that some issues are considered very sensitive and may be very difficult to discuss. It is therefore important to address them in an adequate manner. The organizations provided their insights into how to approach certain topics during the focus groups.

3.2.2 Focus groups in Kigali and Nyamata town

The sampling of the groups followed Buckley-Zistel's (2006a) methodology. This author included alleged perpetrators, ex-prisoners, returnees and survivors of the 1994 genocide, who are based in Kigali and in Nyamata town (countryside) in her research. Therefore, the focus groups consisted of children, aged between 17 and 22 years old (born after the genocide), of alleged perpetrators, ex-prisoners, returnees and survivors of the genocide. One focus group was held with youths living in Kigali; the other with youths from Nyamata town. The decision to incorporate youth from both urban and rural areas, was based on the finding that the nature and scope of the genocide, and the current social interaction differ between rural and urban areas in Rwanda (Mac Ginty 2014; Tonkiss 2003). Theoneste Rutayisire from CBSP summarized this as follows:

> "Very few people are born here, in Kigali I mean. Which means, you don't know each other, so you build on something you have in common. You are coworkers, you are neighbors, you share the same apartments. So then you build on a different base. Yet, in the village, you are born there, your parents were born there, you grew up there. So families that had had conflict, you inherit them. […] So you find yourself in something that your parents have been building. […] That is also why the genocide was so effective in the villages, because people could easily kill their neighbors, since they knew them. Also therefore, the people could not hide. This is not to say that in the city it wasn't just as bad. But in the cities it was maybe because the state machinery was so present there. But in the villages it was much more difficult, more emotional, more personal."[3]

The participants were members of two theatre groups: the "Peace and Love Proclaimers" (PLP) in Kigali, and "The Voice of Life" (TVL) in Nyamata, and regularly performed plays. At the time of the research reported here, both theatre groups were rehearsing a play about unity and reconciliation. The target number of the focus group-participants was ten. In Kigali, eight people participated, whereas in

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[3] Author's interview with Theoneste Rutayisire, researcher at CBSP, on 7 June 2016.

Nyamata thirteen youths attended. The focus groups were held in English. Prior to the focus groups, a topic list was drawn up based on the subjects that were discussed and highlighted during the interviews with the organizations mentioned above. They mainly concerned the content of the plays, the post-genocide situation in Rwanda and the role of youth in nation-building. As some of the topics were considered to be sensitive, direct questions were first drafted to identify the information that was needed. After that, more indirect questions were drawn up, so that the issues could be approached in a less direct way.

During the focus groups, the questions were posed as open as possible, so that the youths would not feel pushed in one way or the other, and could answer the question in whatever way possible. They appeared to be quite resilient and willing to discuss sensitive issues or critical issues, such as the prevalence of hate speech or genocide ideology for instance. Initially, the group members – especially those from PLP – needed some guidance in their discussion, soon they became increasingly eager to contrast or complement each other's ideas and opinions. In this way, the focus groups gave a good insight into the influence of the dominant discourse the GoR spreads, but also into the issues that are subjected to discussion.

3.3 Limitations of the research

One of the limitations of this research concerns the way local narratives have been identified. As mentioned, this research has focused on how the official government discourse and *local narratives* on Rwanda's history and current situation influence youth theatre plays in Kigali and Nyamata town. Ideally, this would have meant that fieldwork in Kigali and Nyamata town was conducted to discover the local narratives that are present in these locations. However, such research requires gaining the trust of the local population, which requires investing a lot of time in interacting with the people. As the time for conducting research and writing this thesis was very limited, it was not possible to conduct this research. The result is that the identification of the local narratives is mostly based on literature review of academic articles on this subject, and the interviews with the organizations working on peace- and nation-building in Rwanda. These sources could not give information on the local narratives in Kigali or Nyamata Town specifically, and only provided a general impression of the existence of local narratives in Rwanda. As such, no clear overview of the (influence of) local narratives in Kigali or Nyamata Town could be established. However, it should be emphasized here that the focus group participants acknowledged that ethnic antagonism persisted among their families, relatives and acquaintances.

Another limitation is related to the high self-censorship of the Rwandan population. As mentioned earlier, the government of Rwanda seeks to spread a de-ethnicizing narrative on the history and current situation of Rwanda, and has introduced some strict rules and regulations that fortify this discourse. The result is that there exists a high level of self-censorship among the Rwandan population. Many of them will not criticize the government or refer to ethnicity in public. This means that, despite

their resilient attitude, the participants of the focus groups did perhaps not feel free to speak frankly during the discussions. However, it is difficult to sense whether what they *say* is or is not in line with what they *think* and *feel.* Related hereto, another limitation is that the youths were only interviewed through focus groups, but not individually. In individual interviews however, the youths would perhaps have been more honest and outspoken about their ideas and feelings.

Last but not least, it was not possible to watch the theatre plays, as those were only performed before or after the research period. As the theatre plays are only performed in *Kinyarwanda* (the local language of Rwanda), the scripts of the theatre plays were only written in Kinyarwanda. The analyses of the content theatre plays is thus only based on the information that the youths gave during the focus groups. As they provided a summary on the play, probably a lot of important details of the theatre plays are missed.

Chapter 4. The official discourse: Creating the truth on who is who

The first chapter briefly outlined the causes, dynamics and aftermath of the 1994 genocide. As this thesis seeks to analyze the difference between the official government discourse and the local narratives on the pre- and post-genocide society in Rwanda, and the 1994 genocide, the purpose of this chapter is to identify the content of the official government discourse. It mostly focuses on analyzing *peaceful imaginaries* - narratives, performances or inscriptions emphasizing history in order to create peace and unity that foster a sense of unity and make future cooperation imaginable

4.1 Peaceful narratives: *Ndi Umunyarwanda*

The GoR's approach to narrating history, and thus fostering unity, has largely been one of overcoming the Hutu/Tutsi-dichotomy that had laid at the core of the genocide. It has aimed to do so through a process of de-ethnicization. That is, a process that seeks to replace ethnicity and other potentially 'divisive sub-state loyalties with another undifferentiating identity, the latter rooted in a re-reading of the history, culture, and language, as a way to achieve social cohesion (Purdukova 2008: 3). In the Rwandan context, this holds that the government has consistently banned references to ethnicity from Rwanda's history and modern society. As to the first, its depicts pre-colonial Rwanda as a land of milk and honey, where ethnicity and conflict were largely absent. Hutu and Tutsi were said to constitute different wealth groups, which allowed well-off Hutus to become Tutsi, and poor Tutsis to become Hutu. Inequality was "inscribed in the differential treatment accorded to each group, [but] they shared the same language and culture; the same clan names, the same customs, and the symbols of kingship served as a powerful unifying bond between them" (Lemarchand 1997: 396). Allegedly the civilians identified themselves as Rwandans, rather than in terms of their clan or ethnicity, and all cohabitated and intermarried. That is, *until* colonization. It were the colonizers that sowed the seeds of ethnic hatred and divisionism, through changing the norms and texture of traditional Rwandan society by reinventing ethnic identities and reshaping the hierarchy between them. This then led to the era characterized by bad leadership, discrimination and exploitation of either Hutus or Tutsis, and, eventually, the 1994 genocide (Buckley-Zistel 2009).[4]

This *peaceful narrative* sketches that ethnicity never existed in Rwanda. Regardless of their ethnic background or clan-affiliation, the country's population in general considered itself to belong to the same group: they identified themselves as Rwandans (*Ndi Umunyarwanda)*. In addition, Hutus and Tutsis were neither tribal, racial or ethnic groups. As such, the conflict in Rwanda was said to be "neither racial, tribal, nor ethnic, but the result of political calculation and manipulation" (Buckley-Zistel 2009: 40). It were the colonizers and the colonizers only that reified ethnicity and made it the defining feature of everyday life. Note how both Hutus and Tutsis are carefully absolved of responsibility here, and are

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[4] It is undeniable that colonialism had a detrimental impact on the social tissue of Rwanda, yet academic research has illustrated that the government's narrative of the peaceful and serene situation in pre-colonial Rwanda is not completely correct either (Buckley-Zistel 2009).

portrayed as the victims of colonial practice. The reasoning goes that, if society was torn apart by politics that constructed ethnic groups and antagonism that were non-existent before, then politics can also reverse this process and unmake these, in essence non-existing, ethnic groups. It is then that the country can return to its pre-colonial situation, to a land of milk and honey.

4.2 Peaceful practices and inscriptions: Commemoration

The idea that all Rwandans are victims of the colonial era and colonial practices, is also reflected in different *peaceful practices* and *peaceful inscriptions*. These can be found all throughout Rwanda. The government has "adopted new national symbols (flag, anthem and emblem) in 2001 because the existing ones 'symbolized the genocide and encouraged an ideology of genocide and divisionism'"(Thomson 2011: 443). Also, the government has changed place names at all administrative levels (from village to provinces) "to protect survivors from remembering where their relatives have died" ((Thomson 2011: 443). *Inscriptions* and performances furthermore seem to be especially prominent in daily life during the national commemoration period in Rwanda. During this period, which starts on 7 April and ends early-July every year, different *inscriptions* reminding people of the genocide are put up throughout the whole of Rwanda. For example, at different government buildings, churches, and schools, flags and banners with messages on the genocide are put up (see figure 1 and figure 2). Also, *performances* such as the national commemoration in the Amahoro stadium in Kigali, community gatherings and the national celebration of the end of the genocide are organized in this period. At first instance, these imaginaries may not necessarily be considered as *peaceful.* On the contrary: they remind the population how divided the country had been once, and the grave consequences of this division. Yet, it is exactly this message that simultaneously makes unity conceivable. To wit, it illustrates the development and improvement in terms of cooperation and cohabitation that the country has seen throughout the past 22 years. Freddy Mutanguha, the regional director of Aegis Trust, captures this as follows:

> "[These places are] a symbol of lack of humanity […] When we are here, we aren't just remembering these innocent lost lives, but we are also here to receive a great lesson about what it means to be human, so that we don't lose our humanity again, here, or anywhere else in the world" (Opobo 2016).

So, those imaginaries illustrate that indeed the social tissue of Rwanda could not possibly have been ripped further apart then in 1994. Yet, is also shows how this social tissue has been mended and will be mended better in the future – and how this well lead to Rwandanness.

Figure 1. Commemoration banner in Kigali (own picture 2016)

Figure 2. Bisesero Memorial (Genocide Archive Rwanda n.d.)

Throughout the course of time however, the government's narrative on the 1994 genocide has become increasingly selective. The first couple of genocide commemorations mourned for *all* Rwandans that had died during the genocide – Hutus and Tutsis alike. Yet, the mourning has become gradually more exclusive since 2004. In that year, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda judged that "the Tutsi were the only victims of crimes committed in Rwanda" (Rafti 2004: 10). This judgement seems to be rather selective and unrepresentative of the past; it failed – and was prohibited by the RPF – to investigate any RPA crimes, or any other crimes perpetrated by Tutsis (Rafti 2004). As mentioned earlier, (moderate) Hutus in and outside of Rwanda were victimized during and after the genocide too. However, since the judgement of the trial, the content of the flags and banners that are put up during the commemoration period, have been changed from **"**To remember the genocide, and to fight against the genocide ideology" to "To remember the genocide *against the Tutsi*, and to fight against the genocide ideology" (emphasis added). The inscriptions at the different memorials scattered throughout the country underwent the same transformation. Simultaneously, on Liberation Day, RPA seniors are heralded and glorified in a national ceremony, for "capturing power from a regime responsible for the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994" (The East African 2016). The GoR has thus narrowed down its definition of who is a survivor and who is a perpetrator, and who is and is not worth commemorating. In contrast to its policy of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* thus, this approach seems to lead to a renewed emphasis on the ethnic divisions it so badly tries to hide. It implies that in essence all Tutsi are victims of the genocide, and whereas this does not mean that all Hutus are necessarily all perpetrators, it implies that all Hutus are at least *not* victims. Moderate Hutus that were murdered for protecting Tutsis during the genocide, as well as the people who fell victim to the crimes perpetrated by the RPA during and after the genocide are thus excluded from the victim-category.

This discourse obviously does not respond with the many different experiences of the population of Rwanda. For example, in what category should the Hutu-man who was forced by the *Interahamwe* to kill his Tutsi-wife be placed then (van Gelderen 2014)? And should people from mixed decent only mourn for their Tutsi relatives, and not for their Hutu-relatives that died (Doná 2012)? Not much attention seems to be paid to the people with such experiences, nor to bystanders, absentees, returnees or saviors (Buckley-Zistel 2006: 101). Yet, the GoR has set strict laws and regulations on

questioning or contesting its official discourse, and people doing so risk fierce repercussions. Let us take a look at how the official narrative is actually spread, and how disobeying it is punished.

4.3 Imposing the official discourse

The GoR has sought to spread its selective discourse through political speeches, interviews, articles, legislation, but seemingly first and foremost through education. The rationale behind this was that ethnic discrimination and hatred in schools facilitated the mobilization of youths for the genocide. In April 1995 therefore, the policy adopted by the education sector "declared that Rwanda would produce citizens free from ethnic regional, national and religious prejudices and who are committed to human rights and the society" (Mafeza 2016). A new curriculum for primary and secondary schools, devoid of racial propaganda, was designed in order to foster national unity and Rwandanness, and to promote tolerance and peace. Also, it was used to neutralize the many different "truths" (subjective stories that often do not match the government's discourse) about what happened in Rwanda before and during the genocide.[5] The GoR has not only invested in school curricula, but also in so called *ingando* camps. These are "re-education camps", where participants are told the *truth* about the background and dynamics of the genocide, and on modern Rwanda society. Initially only ex-prisoners and returning refugees were obliged to enroll in, and graduate from, the camps, but nowadays also informal traders, community leaders, teachers, and genocide survivors are expected to attend. Obviously, the narrative that is spread in schools and the *ingando* camps, is essentially that ethnicity never existed. Every inhabitant of Rwanda is, and has always been, Rwandan rather than Hutu, Tutsi or Twa. Ethnicity is a colonial invention, which caused the genocide *against the Tutsi* (Buckley-Zistel 2009: 43; Purdekova 2008; Thomson 2010). Education is thus used to neutralize these personal stories and to mobilize the people into the discourse of Rwandanness.

A strong legal framework supports this de-ethnicization campaign of the Rwandan government. Following the genocide, different laws criminalizing discrimination, hate speech and genocide ideology were enacted (Mafeza 2016). One of the most influential ones are the law on "divisionism" (2001) and "genocide ideology" (2008), which allow for the imposition of the government's discourse and the elimination of dissident voices. Divisionism is defined as "the use of any speech, written statement, or action that divides people, that is likely to spark conflicts among people, or that causes an uprising which might degenerate into strife among people based on discrimination" (Waldorf 2007: 407). Genocide ideology is defined as "an aggregate of thoughts characterized by conduct, speeches, documents and other acts aiming at exterminating or inciting others to exterminate people basing on ethnic group, origin, nationality, region, color, physical appearance, sex, language, religion or political opinion, committed in normal periods or during war" (Uwizeyimana 2014: 2371). As a result, all references to ethnicity are banned from public discourses; only in state-

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[5] Author's interview with Claver Gatabazi, coordinating the Memory and Genocide Prevention department at CNLG, on 13 June 2016.

sanctioned settings and during the annual commemoration period one is allowed to mention them. This law has affected foreign actors, as well as Rwandan political opposition, press and civil society. Any Rwandan (or foreigner) who opposes or questions the ethnic unity, for example by referring to the ethnic groups or questioning the government's discourse, can easily be accused of promoting divisionism or harboring genocide ideology by the RPF (Thomson 2010; Reyntjens 2010). The fact that the Rwandan state apparatus is highly decentralized, enables the GoR to check whether one behaves in line with its discourse. Through a widespread network of administrations at the smallest levels, it has gained a large network of eyes and ears that monitor the interaction on the ground. Villains can report someone making mention in *gacaca* of RPA crimes; students can report teachers harboring divisionist ideologies; waiters can make mention of hate speech-proclaiming people at their bar. The result is that a state of surveillance is created, which diminishes open dissent and tightens the reproduction and reproducibility of the official script (Hintjens 2008; Thomson 2011; Purdeková 2011).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter sought to analyze the official discourse on the pre- and post-genocide society in Rwanda, and the 1994 genocide, and how this discourse is spread through *peaceful imaginaries.* The GoR portrays pre-colonial Rwanda as the land of milk and honey, where people – despite hierarchical differences – lived peacefully together and all identified as Rwandans. The colonialists then invented ethnicity, leading to an era of discrimination and antagonism, and eventually the 1994 genocide. As ethnicity was invented by the colonialists, the GoR holds that in modern Rwanda, ethnicity does not exist either. In contrast to its narrative of pre- and post-genocide unity, the government does seem to spread a less inclusive discourse regarding the 1994 genocide. Only the Tutsi are acknowledged as genuine victims of the genocide. This seems to ignore the variety of victims that Rwanda houses. Yet, by imposing some strict laws and regulations, the GoR makes sure that people behave according to this discourse – at least in the public realm.

Chapter 5. Local realities: Coping with the official discourse

The previous chapter identified the official narrative that the GoR seeks to spread amongst its citizens. Brubaker et al. (2006) highlights that this political rhetoric however, does not necessarily have to be congruent with the lived experiences of the population. This chapter now analyzes how this dominant discourse resonates with the past and present experiences and narratives of the Rwandan population. In doing so, it uses academic literature, interviews with different (non)governmental organizations working on peace- and nation-building in Rwanda, and focus groups with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali and Nyamata town.

5.1 The everyday importance of ethnicity

Bert Ingelaere (2009) sets forth that Rwanda has made a remarkable progress since the end of the 1994 genocide. Not only in terms of the socio-economic development of the country, but also in terms of the improved social fabric of the country. What was perceived to be impossible right after the genocide, that is, mixed cohabitation and mixed marriages, now increasingly resurfaces in modern Rwanda. Michael[*] (19) gives an insight into how Rwandan daily life looks like nowadays:

> "The state we are in now is a miracle. We really think that, because as of now we go in the same church, same class, intermarriages, same hood, same bars, same beer. If we really analyze our present state, we have hope. We really have hope. Cause a person who was another in 1994-1995, couldn't even dream the present state of this country. How perpetrators will live with survivors in the same country, have intermarriages. But now, yeah, there is hope."[6]

This statement reflects the improvement that the society in Rwanda has made over the past 22 years. Note how this improvement carefully feeds into the *peaceful imaginaries* on Rwanda: the fact that people nowadays live together again, gives hope for even better cooperation in the future. Yet, different scholars are slightly less optimistic. They argue that at first sight, the peace and unity in Rwanda indeed seems to be at a high level, yet this is more likely to be a mere façade (Ingelaere 2009; Buckley-Zistel 2006; Reyntjens 2010). While its selective re-reading of the past and its policy of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* may have led to cooperation, the GoR has not adequately addressed the needs of its population. Therefore, its policy may have led to *unity* but not to the long desired reconciliation (Ingelaere 2009; Buckley-Zistel 2006a; Thomson 2011). The two major pillars of the government's nation-building tactic – that is, the regime's careful demarcation of who is (not) a victim of the genocide, and its emphasis on Rwandanness – seem to have a big influence in this matter.

As to the first, the government's point of view that only Tutsi are genuine victims, quells the variety of experiences of the Rwandan population, whereas it are exactly those experiences which

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[*] This is a fictitious name.
[6] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali, on 13 June 2016.

continue to inform the people's day-to-day lives. This accounts for victims and perpetrators, as well as bystanders and returnees. People of all categories experience poverty, dislocation, being (half-)orphan, and being HIV/AIDS infected as a consequence of the 1994 genocide (Buckley-Zistel 2006b). Enrique (22) grew up without a father, not knowing whether his father had died or was still alive. When he was older, he found out his father was imprisoned because of his role in the genocide. During the Aegis Trust youth conference, he shared the struggles he had when he was younger:

> "One of the things that used to make my life so complicated was growing up only seeing other kids growing up with... like they have two parents, they have mom and they have dad. […] Every time we leave school, their parents – mostly especially dads – came pick them. And then I used to see like kids talking about 'my mother is a soldier, my dad has a restaurant.' My problem was that I could only share stories about my mom" (Kitofu 2016)

On a similar note, Nelly Mukazayire (34), born out of a mixed marriage, grew up assuming her mother had been killed in the genocide. It was only in 1996 that her mother's picture appeared in a newspaper, under the heading "Famous *Interahamwe* captured". Consequently, Mukazayire lost most of her friends, who were genocide survivors. To them she was considered a liar and a traitor (Mukazayire 2016). Yet, irrespective of whether someone is (related to) a genocide survivor, (alleged) perpetrator, bystander or returnee, they are all affected by the genocide. A participant at the Aegis Trust youth conference captured this as follows:

> "We have that generation of people whose parents were killed. And the generation of people whose parents killed. The one whose parents were killed, doesn't have parents. And the persons whose parents killed, do not have parents, as they are imprisoned or are in foreign countries."[7]

The above testimonies all show the limitedness of the regime's discourse, as it only labels Tutsis as victims of the genocide. Yet, the majority of the population seems to be affected. For example, relatives and friends absent at a wedding, are – at least on a personal basis – not more painful for victims than for perpetrators, nor for returnees or bystanders. The fact that the GoR decides who is worth remembering and who is not, gives the idea that some lives are more valuable than others. So, although everyone is Rwandan, still a distinction seems to be made between "Rwandans" and "Rwandans" (Buckley-Zistel 2006b). This brings me to the second element of the nation-building practices that seems to frustrate Rwandan citizens: the regime's claim that ethnicity does not exist and has never existed. Yet, obviously it is exactly this ethnicity that informs people's day-to-day lives. Relatives that were

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[7] Comment made by participant at the Aegis Trust youth conference, on 23 Juny 2016.

killed during the genocide, were killed because of their ethnicity or political affirmation – not because they were just Rwandan. To deny the ethnic character of the genocide, is thus to negate this horrific events (Buckley-Zistel 2006b: 112). Although ethnicity may have been reinforced and made more important by the colonizers decades ago, all events that happened in the name of ethnicity ever since, has made ethnicity more meaningful and tangible – it is not just a label anymore. Rather they are "social categories that carry an enormous emotional charge" (Lemarchand (1997: 398).

It is obvious that ethnic belonging is still a very defining feature in present-day Rwanda. Not only in terms of past physical experiences that continue to affect persons' day-to-day-lives, but also in terms of mindset and behavior. Different scholars and researchers, as well as the youths participating in the focus groups, concluded that ethnicity and ethnic stereotypes are still prevalent in the country (McLean Hilker 2009; Gatabazi and Ngoma 2009)[8]. As speaking about ethnicity is banned from public, it is reduced to the private realm. The next section examines how this affects everyday interaction.

5.2 State surveillance and hidden identities

Mac Ginty (2014) analyzes how people in post-conflict societies or deeply divided societies interact with each other on a daily basis.[9] He concludes that people engage in *everyday peace practices* or *hidden transcripts* in order to "avoid and minimize conflict and awkward situations at both inter- and intragroup levels" (Mac Ginty 2014: 553). Whereas *public transcripts* hold that people behave in line with the rules and norms that are spread by the powerful (often within state reach), *hidden transcripts* resist certain discourses or behaviors imposed by the powerful. Therefore, they mostly find expression outside state reach and are only rarely openly performed (Scott 1990).[10] So, this means that what people say and do in the public realm, differs from what they think and do in the private realm.

Applying this theory to Rwanda, it comes to the fore that under the imposed layer of Rwandanness the ethnic categories still linger, and can easily be triggered. One of the first times I to witness this, was when I visited someone who had just moved from Kigali to Nyamata district:

> The man was complaining about the fact that the goats of his neighbor were walking on *his* property. After listening to this moaning for a while, I asked him why he considered this such a big problem. "NO!", he immediately exclaimed, "I will never accept having goats walking around in my garden!" He calmed down and continued: "You know about our history right? About the Hutus and Tutsis and stuff. You see, in the past Hutus used to herd goats; Tutsis used to herd cows. That's why I, nor my family, will never ever herd goats."[11]

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[8] Author's focus groups with youth performing theatre plays in Kigali and Nyamata town, on 13 and 17 June 2016.
[9] Mac Ginty (2014: 549, 553) defines "deeply divided societies" as follows: "societies in which there is a significant cleavage that goes beyond the political institutions and party politics" and; "societies that may suffer from ethnic or religious cleavages and be prone to episodic direct violence in addition to chronic or structural violence."
[10] Hidden and public transcripts are not only speech acts such as rumors, gossip, folktales and songs, but also gestures, acts, and performances (Scott 1990).
[11] Author's meeting with a man in Nyamata district, on 2 April 2016.

The problem here was not necessarily that his *neighbor*'s goats were walking in his garden, but that it were *goats.* This was amplified by the fact that he did not complain about the cow that was also feasting in his garden. This excerpt thus illustrates how ethnicity is just below the surface in everyday social life. However, it is of course fairly impossible to speak these feelings out loud. Buckley-Zistel (2006a) explains that it is predominantly the structure in Rwanda that *forces* Hutus and Tutsis to cooperate. For example, many of her interviewees have an interest in living together mainly because they have no choice: "'The country is very densely populated and rural dwellers, in particular, live in close proximity to and heavy dependency on each other. Much of agricultural and rural life requires collaboration, since fields have to be ploughed together" (Buckley-Zistel 2006a: 144). Rutasiyare adds that it is quite impossible to *physically* live separately: "You cannot say 'this bridge separates these communities', as they did in Bosnia. You cannot say 'I build this school for this one, or this village is only for this community'. Because here in Rwanda we do not have space."[12] In other words: the two groups are mutually dependent, or do not have another option then living together. Therefore some form of cohesion is necessary – which means keeping ethnicity and ethnic mistrust to oneself. In addition to this communal component, there is also the strict state surveillance that makes people obey the public transcript. As such, people interact with each other, testify in the *gacaca* trials, and tell they forgive one another. However, research finds that in the private realm "a lack of understanding and compassion for the other group prevails amongst survivors on the one hand and accused and their families on the other" (Buckley-Zistel 2006a: 139); that ethnic stereotypes and hate speech persist[13]; that people do not feel justice is done through *gacaca* (Gourevitch 2009); and that – despite their alleged forgiveness – people keep treating each other the same way.[14] The ethnic identities, once so openly performed in Rwanda, are now turned into a *hidden identity.* They are covered up by public transcripts, yet in the safety of the private realm these identities are released.

5.3 Generational differences

Gratuitously accepting and copying the scholars' claims mentioned above, would mean falling in the same trap as they themselves did. That is, in their analysis they do not differentiate between amongst others age, gender, race or geographical location. Others do, but end with a generalizing conclusion on the present situation in Rwanda. Berents and McEvoy-Lecy (2015) however, set forth that age, gender and class are some of the factors that define why or to what extent people (do not) engage in nation- and peacebuilding. When taking this into account, it is clear that especially the elder generation, the one that personally and consciously experienced the genocide, inhibits those ethnic classifications and stereotypes. Joseph Nkurunziza from NAR argues this is not surprising:

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[12] Author's interview with Theoneste Rutayisire, researcher at CBSP, on 7 June 2016.

[13] Author's interview with Claver Gatabazi, coordinating the Memory and Genocide Prevention department at CNLG, on 13 June 2016. Author's interview with Theoneste Rutayisire, researcher at CBSP, on 7 June 2016.

[14] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Nyamata town, on 17 June 2016.

"Of course it is there. The society was indoctrinated for 35 years with ethnic hatred (1959 – 1994). You can't expect, 22 years down the road, to have it changed. It was implemented through education, media, policies. It needs more time than the period we have been operating in."[15]

Tearing down a discourse that pervaded society for decades and brought out possibly the worst in mankind, of course takes time. The danger of this, is that the older generation's hidden ethnic identity and ethnic tensions influence the generation that was born after the genocide. Numerous reports have been made of parents still using derogatory or dehumanizing to refer to the other ethnic group, such as "cockroaches", "snakes" and "dogs", or people forbidding their children to interact with specific persons, because of the other's identity (Ndahimana 2016). This is illustrated by Malvine (21):

"We are affected by genocide ideology, which is telling the mindset of the different people. Well you can fall in love with a boy or a girl. And when there is a time to get married, they will say no , you are not getting married with that guy. Cause they were among the people who killed our people" (Kitofu 2016).

These reports and testimonies show that the government's discourse of long-existing unity and Rwandanness, which is based on a rhetoric or argumentation that 'everything was fine, so everything should be fine', largely seems to fall on deaf ears when it comes to the older generation. This however, sounds too generalizing and too negative for the current in Rwanda. There are also many stories of survivors, perpetrators, bystanders and returnees that have reconciled. Also, CNLG concluded that between 1995 and 2015 the genocide ideology amongst the Rwandan population decreased with 83.1 percent, implying that only fifteen percent of the population continues to possess genocide ideology.[16] Simultaneously, the participants of the focus group in Kigali, exemplified that there are also parents that admit to their children they participated in the genocide, but warn them not to do the same.[17] In addition, the fact that parents transmit hate speech and ethnic stereotypes to their children, does not necessarily mean that those youth also act upon them. As emphasized by Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015), it especially the youth that is capable of resisting or amplifying specific discourses or structures.

5.4 Conclusion

Although at first sight it may seem that the discourse of the GoR resonates among the local population, as they live intermingled and interact on a daily basis, there is more to this daily interaction than meets

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[15] Author's interview with Joseph Nkurunziza, country director Never Again Rwanda, on 10 June 2016.
[16] Author's interview with Claver Gatabazi, coordinating the Memory and Genocide Prevention department at CNLG, on 13 June 2016.
[17] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali, on 13 June 2016.

the eye. Especially due to its de-ethnicizing character and its limited definition of genocide victims, the government's discourse is to a large extent incongruent with the past and present experiences of the Rwandan population. In particular the older generation that consciously experienced the genocide has difficulties accepting government's version of reality. However, the social structure and high state surveillance in Rwanda forces the population engage in a public transcript of unity. Yet, in the private realm, ethnic identities and tensions resurface. The next chapter analyzes how the official discourse and local narratives influence theatre plays carried out by youth in Kigali and Nyamata town.

Chapter 6. Youth theatre plays: Official discourse or local realities?

The previous two chapters analyzed the duality of nationhood. It identified the discourse on the Rwandan history that the government of Rwanda tries to make its citizens internalize, and it put forward how to a large extent this discourse does *not* resonate with the lived experiences of the population. On the basis of the focus groups in Kigali and Nyamata town, this chapter seeks to identify how the official government discourse and the local narratives are reflected in the youth theatre plays in Kigali and Nyamata town.

6.1 Background information PLP and TLV

The PLP theatre group is based in Kigali and was founded in 2014, yet it has seen members joining later or leaving earlier. During the focus group discussion, the members indicated that the main reason for them to join the group was that, apart from their passion for theatre and other forms of art, they wanted to use their talents and abilities to positively influence others. That is, they wanted to promote peace, unity and reconciliation among the people. They mentioned they are inspired by their history and therefore seek to express those messages of unity and reconciliation. Yet, at times they also perform comedies or plays not related to the genocide. The target group of the theatre plays differs per event, yet are always situated in Kigali. PLP sometimes plays for small audiences, but for instance in 2015 they performed during the annual genocide commemoration in the national stadium in Kigali. This brings us to the point of government support. The group indicates that sometimes they receive government support in the form of subsidies, or advice on the content of their play. For example, they explained that they can approach the Ministry of Youth or the Business Development Fund (BDF) – which partners with the government – with a specific project proposal. The institutions then, can advise on the approach or the content of the proposal, and provide some subsidy. At times they were asked by governmental institutions to perform a play – as was the case with the performance in the stadium for example. At the time of research, the group was writing and rehearsing a new theatre play on the causes of genocide, which will be performed at a high school in Kigali. This was their own initiative, yet they were opting for subsidy from BDF.[18]

TVL is based in Nyamata town and was founded in 2015, yet just as PLP its membership has been dynamic. During the focus group discussion, it became clear that most of the members joined the group as they sought to contribute to rebuilding and developing the country, and changing's people mindset for the better. They underscored that they even saw themselves, as youth, as tasked with these responsibilities. They immediately referred to the fact that the youth had played a significant role in the genocide. Therefore, it was now the task of the youth to rebuild the nation. The TVL-members indicated that all their theatre plays are about peace and reconciliation – or themes related to that, such as social cohesion or community cooperation. The target group of the theatre plays differs per event. The members of TVL indicated that they perform their plays at schools and at other times at community

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[18] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali, on 13 June 2016.

meetings in and around Nyamata village. The scope of the audience differed per occasion, ranging from ten to hundreds of attendees. As to government support, TVL indicated that they were not supported by the government or governmental institutions. At the time of research, TVL was writing and rehearsing a new play on the causes and dynamics of genocide.[19]

It seemed that both groups were aware of the discrepancy between the official government discourse and the local realities and narratives and the pre- and post-genocide society in Rwanda, and the 1994 itself. The following statements illustrate this:

> "Our leaders say that they fought a war, a physical war against genocide. They say that now *we* have to fight for our unity and eradicating poverty. On the point of unity, we cannot ignore that there are still parents or families which still have some genocide ideology […] They tell them the history, but sometimes they include some wrong facts. That is why we are here playing those sketches, teaching the history."[20] (David[*], 18 years old)

> "The main group who killed those people during the genocide were youth. […] Therefore we ask ourselves: if it had been done by the youth, if we can continue by making conflict, it may be repeated again, the genocide […] That is why we say we must fight it."[21] (Jean Claude[*], 17 years old)

> "The youth is the future of the country. If you do not promote unity and reconciliation, the country is going nowhere. You run the risk of repeating history as we are not reconciling. There is a great burden to the youth to promote this unity and reconciliation."[22] (Michael[*], 19 years old)

These statements clearly illustrate that the youths feel that, if the subjective histories by the older generation are not countered, another genocide may happen. They therefore feel empowered as well as responsible to promote unity among the population. The next sections analyze how PLP and the TVL tackle this in their theatre plays.

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[19] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Nyamata town, on 17 June 2016.
[20] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali, on 13 June 2016.
[*] This is a fictitious name.
[21] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Nyamata town, on 17 June 2016.
[*] This is a fictitious name.
[22] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali, on 13 June 2016.
[*] This is a fictitious name.

6.2 From unity to diversity

Already from the rhetoric used by the youths participating in the focus group – take for instance their emphasis on spreading "peace, unity and reconciliation", three words often used by the Rwandan government itself – it appeared that the PLP theatre play would align with the official government discourse on the history and current situation in Rwanda. The outline of PLP's theatre play therefore came as no surprise:

> The play educates the high school students on the pre-colonial unity that pervaded Rwanda, and how this unity was then destroyed when the colonialists arrived in the country. Attention then shifts to the discrimination that plagued Rwandan society for decades, and how this led to the genocide. It then shifts to the aftermath of the genocide. The theatre play is left in suspense, in order to trigger the audience to think about how small disputes can lead to bigger conflicts, and how this can affect daily life.[23]

At first sight, it may seem that this theatre play neatly matches the discourse that the GoR seeks to spread: the pre-colonial unity is there, the colonialists are present and the genocide is emphasized. However, on closer examination the theatre play appears not to be such an identical copy of the official discourse. Whereas the official discourse argues that all Rwandans are now Rwandan, carefully note how PLP's theatre play make the youth themselves decide on what the influence of the genocide was on daily life. The post-genocide Rwandanness is not explicitly mentioned. It may even be the case – and this requires some background information – that the play aims to have the opposite effect of making everyone feel Rwandan. One of focus group participants explained the piece was written for the younger post-genocide generation (eleven to sixteen years old), as they take the history of the country for granted:

> "Those people in high school, mainly youth, they take our history as something which happened, which just happened. They don't care. They were born after that history. Most of them they are not getting what they have to do to shape themselves. So, in our scripts, it is like: take your time. Take your time and evaluate yourself. What am I doing? Where am I going? Where am I right now? Where did I come from?"[24]

Whereas – in theory – the government of Rwanda would probably cheer the development of a generation that does not let Rwanda's history influence their daily interaction, PLP actually seeks to draw attention to the differences between people, and how these differences can be used in a negative way. The explanation to this theatre focus, seems to lay in two things: the denying of difference in the

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[23] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali, on 13 June 2016.
[24] Ibid.

government discourse, and the hidden transcripts within families. As emphasized by a participant in the Aegis Trust youth conference, the de-ethnicization campaign of the Rwandan government, runs the risk of making people believe that in order to live together, everyone should be the same. But in reality everyone is not the same and will still hold specific perceptions about reality.[25] Celine* (21 years old) acknowledges that "it is undeniable that there are still parents or families that still have some genocide ideology […] and children can get corrupted by their parents."[26] PLP therefore seeks to emphasize the differences between people, how these differences can be used negatively – but also positively, and to educate them on the early warning signs of genocide. The fact that in the run op to the genocide students were easily manipulated and mobilized into a discourse that justified violence, seems to play a role here too.

6.3 From diversity to unity

Whereas the theatre play of the PLP seem to start with a narrative that largely fits within the official discourse of the government, but actually seems to aim for a different outcome than adhering to the government's policy of Rwandanness, the theatre play of TVL seems to take it the other way around:

> There are two families, one who participated in the genocide and one that was victimized. However, the play shows the audience how the families, have reconciled themselves. They interact and they have married. However, both families tell their children, born after the genocide, how the other family has killed their older brother. The result is that the children feel they have to resent the other family. The idea is to show people how to reconcile, and how their behavior affects the behavior of children.[27]

At first sight this theatre play seems to follow the government narrative too: two families – former enemies – unite, intermarry and live happily ever after. However, on closer examination this theatre play obviously rather emphasizes the local narratives and local realities within Rwanda. It indicates that under this outer layer of unity and intermarriage, another reality lingers that disrupts the families as well as the families' children. However, rather than exemplifying how the families learn to live with each other's differences, emphasis is put on how people have to *reconcile* with each other. Despite the fact that the youth acknowledge that "it is difficult to change the minds of the elderly"[28], they continue to copy the official government discourse.

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[25] Comment made by participant at the Aegis Trust youth conference, on 23 June 2016.
* This is a fictitious name.
[26] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Kigali, on 13 June 2016.
[27] Author's focus group with youths performing theatre plays in Nyamata town, on 13 June 2016.
[28] Ibid.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter brought to the fore how the official government discourse and local narratives on the history of Rwanda, has shaped the theatre plays performed by the Peace and Love Proclaimers in Kigali, and The Voice of Life in Nyamata Town. It seems that both groups struggle to find a mid-way between the official government discourse. On the one hand, PLP resonates the official discourse, yet also aims to make their audience think critically about their everyday life. On the other hand, TVL seems to be inspired by local narratives and experiences to a large extent. Yet, in the end they adhere to government's official discourse by promoting unity and reconciliation. The groups thus seem to straddle the divide between the official discourse and the local narratives. Yet both groups implicitly acknowledge that unity may still be far away.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to analyze how both the official government discourse and local narratives on the pre- and post-genocide society in Rwanda, and the 1994 genocide itself, affect the content of theatre plays that performed by youth theatre groups in Kigali and Nyamata town between June and August 2016. Therefore, it first identified the official government discourse, and then at how these discourses were reified or countered by narratives of the local population in Rwanda.

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, the government of the country has tried to rebuild the nation and to forge a national identity among the population. In the words of Benedict Anderson (1991): it examined how the government has aimed to (re)create an imagined community. This community is imagined because its members will never meet or get to know the majority of their fellow members. Yet a strong feeling of equal and egalitarian comradeship among them – for example through engaging in rituals or performances at the same time – which forms the idea and image of this community. On a similar note, Anthony Smith (1996) emphasizes that collective myths, memories, traditions, and symbolic codes feed such national identities and idea of imagined community. The way that the government of Rwanda has tried to foster an imagined community in post-genocide in Rwanda, is by creating a myth on the Rwandanness of Rwandans. It holds that pre-colonial Rwanda, despite its strong hierarchical character, was a land of milk and honey, where people lived peacefully together and all identified as "Rwandans". The arrival of the colonialists meant the end of this peace and unity. The invention or reification of ethnicity in Rwanda by the colonialists, led to decades of ethnic discrimination, hatred, and manipulation; and, eventually, to the 1994 genocide. This narrative seems to devoid all Rwandans of responsibility, since they were merely manipulated and mobilized into a certain discourse by the colonizers. Essentially thus, all Rwandans suffer collectively from colonialism. While in earlier times people were mobilized to participate in the genocide, people nowadays collectively experience the aftermath of the genocide: given the magnitude of the genocide, there do not seem to be many families left unaffected.

The Rwandan government's approach builds on this myth by stating that, as in pre-colonial Rwanda everyone identified as Rwandan, ethnicity in the modern world does not exist either. It has introduced multiple laws and regulations to discipline its citizens in this discourse. However, this discourse does not seem to resonate with the past and lived experiences of the local population, whose daily lives continue to be informed by the genocide. The relatives or friends that have been killed, were killed exactly because of this ethnicity or political affirmation – not because they were just Rwandans. In addition, the official discourse on the genocide seems to have become increasingly exclusive, Whereas initially all Rwandans that died during the genocide were mourned for during the annual commemoration, now only the Tutsi are commemorated, for they are seen as the only genuine victims of the genocide. This gives the impression that certain "Rwandans" are more valuable to remember. The government's exclusive discourse on the genocide itself thus detracts the imagined community it aims to build through its glorifying narrative on Rwandanness. The result is that ethnic identities

continue to be a defining feature of people's daily lives and interaction, and that ethnic stereotypes and antagonism continue to exist. Yet, due to the strict legislation on genocide ideology and divisionism that the government of Rwanda has imposed, these ethnic features are largely limited to the private realm or hidden under the superficial layer of Rwandanness.

This does not mean that the regime's nation-building project has completely failed. Based on focus group discussions with youth in Kigali and Nyamata town, this thesis found that the government's discourse has significantly more influence on the generation that was born after the genocide. Based on these discussions, it seems that the youths quite well internalized the government's discourse on pre-colonial unity and Rwandanness. In the most extreme (or successful?) case, it has produced youths that are aware of Rwanda's history, but do not let their daily lives get affected by it. Yet, a bigger number of youths seem to struggle between the official discourse – often spread by schools or other government institutions – and the more personal stories of their parents or relatives which may be subjective and may include ethnic prejudices. The fact that in the past many youths were mobilized for the genocide exactly through such personal and perhaps discriminating narratives, seems to make the youths that participated in the focus group extra motivated to spread the official discourse of unity and Rwandanness among their peers and relatives. In doing so, a balance needs to be sought between spreading unity – for unity leads to peace – and underscoring the past in order educate people on the early signs of genocide. In that sense, it seems that the youth's theatre plays do not only copy the official discourse because of the high state surveillance on people's behavior. They also seem to be informed by a "what *if* it happens again"-mentality. This observation then also sheds a different light on the Rwandan population's rationality behind hiding ethnicity in the public realm; they not only do so because of state surveillance, but also to ignore or hide possible ethnic tensions. The overall conclusion that can be drawn from these observations is that however badly Rwandans might want to be "Rwandan", the country's history continues to make this goal difficult to achieve. It is clear that the country has gone a long way, but still has a long way ahead. As Nelson Mandela once mentioned: "I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb" (Meredith 2010: 518). This statement could probably not be more applicable to any other country than to Rwanda, the land of a thousand hills.

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