

The Perpetrator as Citizen

Self-identification from National Hero to Victimised Subject

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Thesis RMA History

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Date: 23th of June 2017

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Introduction

*“I never tortured, it was not my job. But if they had asked me to torture, sure I would have. The Navy taught me to destroy. They did not teach me how to build, they taught me how to destroy. I know how to put mines and bombs, I know how to infiltrate, I know how to disarm an organization, I know how to kill. All that I know, I do well. I always say: I am crude, but I had a single act of lucidity in my life: that was to get into the Navy”.*¹

Alfredo Astiz.

*“The crowd had grown. I seized the machete, I struck a first blow. When I saw the blood bubble up, I jumped back a step. Someone blocked me from behind and shoved me forward by both elbows. I closed my eyes and I delivered a second blow like the first. It was done, people approved, they were satisfied and moved away. I drew back. I went off to sit on the bench of a small cabaret, I picked up a drink, I never looked back in that unhappy direction.”*²

Jean-Baptiste Murangira.

The quotes by Argentinian intelligence officer Alfredo Astiz and Rwandan farmer Jean-Baptiste Murangira provide a specific, personal lens to view the world’s recent past. War and genocide have made the twentieth century the most deadly period in human history and the violence continues into the twenty-first. Regular warfare, country versus country, fought by regular armed forces have been most lethal. Civilians have suffered in war, mostly because of enemy bombings, deprivation of basic needs such as food and medicine and psychologically due to fear and the loss of family members. Even though the highest death rate is among professional soldiers, regular warfare is not the only form of violence that has marked the past hundred years. Authoritarian regimes have inflicted mass violence on their own populations in many distinctive cases. Instead of a legitimate or ‘just war’, these regimes embarked on an internal war against ‘dangerous elements’ within their own population.

Several scholars, such as Scott Straus, have argued that mass violence against civilians occurs when a state feels threatened. There is a security concern and this sense of threat is related to a specific group of people in society. The dangerous group is portrayed as outside of the core political community that the state serves.³ Patrick Babajanian makes a similar argument, authoritarian regimes use mass violence against civilians when they feel that their

¹ Interview Alfredo Astiz by Gabriella Cerrutti, published in *Tres Puntos*, January 16, 1998.

² Interview Jean-Baptiste Murangira in Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak* (New York 2003) 23.

³ Scott Straus, *Making and Unmaking Nations. War, Leadership and Genocide in Modern Africa* (Ithaca & London 2015) 55-57.

power is challenged. He states that therefore genocide is sign of weakness, the resort to mass violence is the final solution.⁴ The government's self-confidence is clearly under threat. Interestingly the threat is linked to a group with a different identity than the state's core identity, in other words: there is an outgroup that threatens the existence and legitimate rule of the ingroup. Mass or genocidal violence against this outgroup is therefore legitimised, actively dividing society in different groups and stripping one or more groups from any legal or moral protection.⁵ There is an evolution from moral to immoral behaviour, influenced through reason and emotion.⁶

Violence against their own civilians requires a strong organisation of the state and cooperation with local actors. It requires a high level of persuasion to convince people, whether they are state actors such as the military and police or regular civilians, to condone violence against their fellow citizens, even their neighbours. Even more so to convince them of actively contributing to the violence. Narratives to delegitimise a group and banishing them from society take form mostly along ethnic, racial, religious or national lines.⁷ Political groups or political identities can be 'outgrouped' as well. The narrative along which society is divided is mostly based on the foundational narrative of the ruling regime. The narratives legitimises its power, therefore threats to its power are logically framed along the same line. The potential perpetrators of violence are indoctrinated with this narrative. They self-identify with the narrative and their group's legitimate rule, and –if convinced of the threat the outgroup poses- are likely to condone or commit violence against this outgroup.⁸ The stronger the narrative of exclusion, the more people are likely to become complicit in mass atrocities and genocide.

When the violence ends, usually due to the authoritarian regime being overthrown or handing over power after negotiations, the post-conflict society is left damaged. Many civilians have lost their lives, people have lost family members, they are traumatised by the past events and the state's government and institutions have to be rebuilt. Another problematic element is the fact that the past narrative, the polarising narrative that contributed to this misery, is still present in society. The same lines of division still stand. Recovery from the past violence and future reconciliation remain problematic in this situation.

⁴ Patrick Babajanian, 'Identity and Power in Perpetrating Genocide', in: *Peace Review* 27:1 (2015) 72-73.

⁵ Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-1945* (New Haven 2010) 103-104.

⁶ J. Verplaetse, J. de Schrijver, S. Vanneste and J. Braeckman eds., *The Moral Brain. Essays on the Evolutionary and Neuroscientific Aspects of Morality* (2009) 245-247.

⁷ These groups are included in the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention.

⁸ Straus, *Making and Unmaking Nations. War, Leadership and Genocide in Modern Africa*, 67-68.

Depending on the post-conflict regime, several measures and mechanisms can help to process the violent past and promote reconciliation. Trials, truth commissions, reparation policies and official remembrances and monuments are among the most important transitional justice measures. Transitional justice measures serve four main goals: to determine the truth, provide justice, institutionalise democratic reform and create durable peace.⁹ Although transitional justice mechanisms have made many positive contributions, it can have downsides as well. The mechanisms, such as trials, truth commissions and reparations, are set to determine who is to blame for the past and who has suffered. It crystallises the division between perpetrators and victims and treats them accordingly, with (for example) prison sentences or reparations and monuments. Furthermore it establishes the dominant narrative of the past, thereby legitimising one group's narrative and delegitimising others.

The prominence of a single narrative on the violent past creates a hierarchy in the post conflict society. One or more groups retain a power position, while other groups are removed from this power position. Jie-Hyun Lim introduces the concept of 'victimhood nationalism'. Lim argues that victimhood can become crystallised in society, it can become part of the identity of the victim group and thereby inheritable to future generations. The identity of victim can become a desirable power position, as they control the narrative of the past. Collective guilt crystallises the same way, an entire group is held responsible, including the group members who did not commit crimes themselves, as well as the next generation. The identity of perpetrator becomes tied to the status of second class citizen.¹⁰ As clear from the previous statement: the victim group becomes the new primary identity group the state is supposed to serve, thereby marginalising the other groups. A new foundational narrative of the state is created. The victims' memories are sacralised and they acquire a monopoly on understanding and explaining the past. This monopoly includes official narratives and remembrances, but extends to other transitional justice mechanisms such as trials and truth commissions as well. Lars Waldorf provides an excellent example of victimhood nationalism in the prosecutions in Rwanda. The victim group (Tutsi), which held the power position after the violent conflict, considered the entire ethnic Hutu group guilty. More importantly, it conserved only them as guilty, no Tutsi could be blamed for any violent event in the past (even though it has been established that violence –on different scales- was committed by

⁹ Neil Kritz, 'Policy Implications of Empirical Research on Transitional Justice', in: Merwe, Hugo van der Merwe, Victoria Baxter and Audrey R. Chapman eds., *Assessing the Impact of Transitional Justice: Challenges for Empirical Research* (Washington 2009) 13-14.

¹⁰ Jie-Hyun Lim, 'Victimhood Nationalism in Contested Memories: National Mourning and Global Accountability', in: Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad eds., *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (New York 2010) 138-139.

both groups). Waldorf calls this ‘victor’s justice’, a total delegitimisation of the ‘guilty groups’ in society.¹¹ Victimhood and victimhood nationalism, thereby, can become an obstacle to reconciliation.

Where does this leave the guilty groups in society? Especially in societies with a large group of perpetrators, their marginalisation cannot last forever if a society wants to reconcile and look towards the future. Moreover, the group will not accept this marginalisation forever. The dominant narrative in society cannot accommodate the perpetrators’ memories and narratives. Individual perpetrator and perpetrator groups have to reframe their narrative of the past, in order to reclaim a position in society. Kühne established that perpetrators experience a sense of belonging to the state and nation they serve when perpetrating violent crimes.¹² After all they were the ones ‘protecting the state from dangerous elements’ and ‘protecting the people’. How does their narrative and sense of belonging change after the violence is over, and the regime they served is no longer in power? Although the victim group is crystallised, the dominant narrative is not static. The memory policies of post-conflict governments, transnational exchange of ideas and even simply time can change the views on the past. Ideas of what makes a ‘good citizen’ change as well, varying from patriotic heroism, to innocent family man, to human rights activist. As stated above, to legitimate themselves and generate more power (or even as much as equality) in society the perpetrators need a new way to present themselves. What are new ways for them to do this? How do they create a break from the past, and from their past self? Do they and if so, how do they fit into the new foundational narrative of the state? This leads to the main question of this research project: *How have perpetrator narratives of self-identification and legitimisation shifted over the post conflict years in Argentina and Rwanda to reclaim citizenship?*

In order to answer the research question this thesis will consider two case studies of mass violence by an authoritarian state against its own civilians: Argentina and Rwanda. Although the conflicts happened on different continents, many similarities can be found, making the comparison interesting. Both countries were controlled by an authoritarian government, both had a dominant narrative that singled out one group as belonging to the state and delegitimising other specific groups, both killed a substantive part of its citizens, and both –up to this day- largely fail to construct a truth about the past.

¹¹ Lars Waldorf, ‘Rwanda’s failing experiment in restorative justice’, in: Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tiff eds., *Handbook of restorative justice: a global perspective* (London 2006) 422-432.

¹² Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler’s Community, 1918-1945*, 67-67, 103-104.

Argentina was led by a right wing, military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, the state was authoritarian and crushed all opposition to their regime. The Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, as the regime called itself, sought to reorganise the Argentinian state after a period of civil unrest and to get rid of all ‘non-Argentine’ elements in society. The conflict was framed as a counter guerrilla against these elements. It would result in an estimated 30.000 people dead or disappeared and a society divided on the interpretation of its past, lasting up to this day.¹³

Rwanda suffered a civil war from 1990 to 1994. The Hutu-majority Habyarimana regime was challenged by the Tutsi-majority Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), its army attacking from the Ugandan border. The Tutsi had been a marginalised group in Rwandan society ever since the 1959 Hutu social revolution and the RPF aimed to reclaim a position for the Tutsis in Rwanda. During the climax of the violence, from 6 April to 4 July 1994, the country was led by a Hutu nationalist, authoritarian government. Tutsis, some of which had relations with the RPF but most did not, and moderate Hutus who opposed the regime were killed, resulting in an estimation of 500,000 to 1 million deaths.¹⁴ In July 1994 the RPF took control of the country, installing a Tutsi controlled regime. The new Rwanda is again divided, this time marginalising the Hutu group.

In both conflicts the state was the main perpetrator of the violence, organising different elements in society such as the military, the police and even regular civilians in the spiral of violence. The regimes responsible for the violence were forcibly removed from government, and faced trials and truth commissions.¹⁵ This thesis will focus on ‘low level’ perpetrators, not the leaders who organised it, but the people who actually committed the violence. In both cases, most of these perpetrators remained within the new society, stripped from their previous power. A contrast between the cases is the type of regime that came to power after the transition. While Argentina became a (albeit fragile) democracy, Rwanda’s new regime was a dictatorship. The space for perpetrators to construct and narrate their version of the past differs because of this reason. This thesis will research the different narratives constructed by the perpetrator groups and the way they present themselves. The way these perpetrator narratives try to claim citizenship in the new state will be a second

¹³ Ton Robben, ‘Vuile oorlog, staatsterreur of genocide? De Argentijnse worsteling met de herinnering aan de militaire dictatuur van 1976-1983’, in: *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 35:1 (2011) 530. Official estimations by the government and human rights organisations vary between 8.000 and 30.000 people dead and/or disappeared.

¹⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda* (Kampala 2002) 215-218.

¹⁵ Argentina instituted a commission to research the past (CONADEP), which later led to trials. Rwanda’s perpetrators faced trials both internationally (ICTR) as well as nationally (national and Gacaca courts), which also served as official truth telling.

element of the study. The different ideas of victimhood nationalism and victor's justice in Argentina and Rwanda may lead to different ways of perpetrator presentation and legitimisation, but this thesis will demonstrate that there are more general perpetrator narratives in post-conflict societies as well.

The questions that this thesis addresses demand a specific kind of sources. This project makes use of perpetrator narratives. Perpetrators, however, are mostly more reluctant to speak about their personal history than victims are, simply because they are or feel guilty and could harm their position by for example confessing. The thesis is based on a variety of interviews, published either in academic books and articles or in journalistic articles. Furthermore, I make use of court testimonies and published autobiographies of perpetrators. The sources are limited to the extent that they cannot give historical truths about the past, but they do give an emotional truth. People's memories are not fully reliable and moreover, people lie. The sources do give a representative image of exactly that: the way people want to remember the past, the way they want to present themselves and how they use this to create legitimacy for themselves in the present.

This thesis is structured through sub-questions in three different chapters. The first chapter concentrates on the historiography of perpetrator focussed research, post conflict dynamics (including transitional justice and memory studies) and the hierarchy between victims and perpetrators in society. The literature focusses on different cases of state inflicted violence all over the world from the Armenian genocide in 1915, to the Second World War, Latin-American dictatorships and decolonisation conflicts up to today. How have societies dealt with their violent past, the victims and perpetrators and how have they worked towards justice and reconciliation? What positions have perpetrators and victims (and groups representing them) taken in the post-conflict society? The chapter furthermore provides a theoretical and methodological framework on the study of perpetrators, their narratives of legitimisation and their position in society. The second and third chapter are each divided in three sub-questions, analysing the case studies of Argentina and Rwanda respectively. The first question addresses the dynamics of narrative and official remembrance in the country in the post conflict years. What factors have shaped the dominant narrative and how has it developed? The second question focuses on the way perpetrators have presented themselves. How do they identify themselves? How do they present themselves, which stages and opportunities do they use and what kind of language do they use? The third question of the chapters focusses on the way these narratives relate to the idea of citizenship. To what extent have these narratives and claims of identity been influenced by changing ideas of citizenship?

Furthermore it questions how these narratives relate to other groups in society, and how they challenge the existing hierarchy. Are they able to reclaim their citizenship in society? The conclusion will discuss the results for both case studies and assess what distinctions and similarities can be found. Are there similarities in the way perpetrators identify themselves and use their narratives for legitimisation and the reclaiming of citizenship?

Post-conflict dynamics and perpetrator narratives

This first chapter will focus on the historiography of post conflict dynamics and perpetrator centred research. As the next chapters are divided in three sub-questions, the theory and historiography will be centred around these three different topics. First the historiography of memory and narrative in society will be discussed; how do societies remember and why? The second part discusses the way perpetrators present themselves in different stages, what language they use and what strategies. This part will also provide my methodological framework for analysing the perpetrator narratives used in this thesis. The third part focusses on the link between perpetrators and citizenship. What defines a citizen, and how has the concept of citizenship changed?

Memory and narrative

Memory and narrative are two separate, but intertwining concepts. Narrative is the expression of memory, whether truthful or not. Furthermore, narratives influence memories the other way around as well: sociologist and founding father of memory studies Maurice Halbwachs once stated that collective memory is at the core of historical development of humanity. In his opinion, individual memories are always situated within a larger framework of collective memory, individual experiences only gain meaning through this collective memory framework.¹⁶ Aleida Assmann identifies a similar relation between the individual and the collective: individual and group memories are social memories, they are constructed bottom up. They can become dominant in society and propagated top-down, these memories and narratives than become political, national or ‘cultural’ memories.¹⁷ Memories become a narrative that communicates a message to the rest of society. These memories can be transmitted intergenerational, whether through the memory or narrative by a specific group or through national commemorations and education. The memories become “postmemories”, the second and third generations who have not experienced the events themselves have a ‘memory’ of the events. This postmemory shapes the way they remember and narrate the past.¹⁸

With different groups in society it is clear where the problems starts: different groups compete with each other through their narratives. Each group wants their collective memory

¹⁶ Erika Apfelbaum, ‘Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory’, in: Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz eds., *Memories, Theories, Debates* (Fordham 2010) 78-83.

¹⁷ Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, in: *Poetics Today* 29:1 (2008) 109-111.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 107-109.

and collective narrative as the dominant one, as it determines who is right about the past and who is wrong. Furthermore, in the case of violent histories, it determines who is a victim and who is a perpetrator, and who should be memorialised and honoured versus who should be prosecuted and sentenced. Some memories are completely absent from the dominant narrative in society. Frank van Vree argued that memory serves ideological needs, the group who determines the dominant narrative controls the past through the present.¹⁹

When the past is traumatic, it makes the competition for memory even more harsh, traumatic memories are often incorporated into the social identity of a specific group. The past is experienced as a ‘cultural trauma’.²⁰ Delegitimising the narrative becomes similar to delegitimising the group’s identity, intensifying the struggle between groups and the hierarchy that arises from this struggle. The concept of ‘victimhood nationalism’ is a logic consequence of this struggle. In post conflict society the victim group often has the ‘moral high ground’, sacralising their memories which cannot be challenged by other groups in society. They have a monopoly on understanding the past.²¹ Emilio Crenzel describes this dominance of one narrative as a ‘memory regime’. To keep this narrative in place it is propagated through for example official commemorations, media and education. One group holds the power over the past, not to be challenged by others.²²

Having discussed the reasons why specific memories and narratives take a hold in society the question rises as of how this dominant memory can ever change. The concept of ‘critical junctures’, here discussed by Francesca Lessa, explains that several factors can create a juncture that leads to change. Combined actions by the political elite, opposition groups and/or the international society, and the surfacing of new evidence can have an impact that changes the dominant narrative.²³ The specific narrative changes in Argentina and Rwanda will be discussed in chapter two and three. As is clear from the above, the struggle for memory and therefore a legitimate place in society is complicated by traumatic memories, especially when there is not a single experience community that shares that traumatic

¹⁹ Frank van Vree, ‘Absent Memories’, in: *Cultural Analysis* 12 (2013) 2-5.

²⁰ Jeffrey C. Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, in: Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka eds., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley 2004). 15, 22-23.

²¹ Lim, ‘Victimhood Nationalism in Contested Memories: National Mourning and Global Accountability’, 139-140.

²² Emilio Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina disappearances: the political history of "Nunca más"* transl. by Laura Pérez Carrara (New York 2012) 3-6.

²³ Francesca Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity* (Basingstoke 2013) 23-27.

narrative. The dominant narrative in society is a crucial factor in the way other groups interact with the past. The next part of this chapter will explain some of these strategies applied.

Perpetrator narratives

Perpetrators present themselves on many different ‘stages’, whether they speak among peers, defend themselves in court, explain themselves on national television or showcase their experiences in a published diary or autobiography the perpetrators narrative is a performance.²⁴ The language chosen for each performance is different. As Neitzel and Welzer have discovered in their research on German prisoners of war, when speaking amongst peers there will be less to hide, more pride and heroism to boast about and a better power position to be claimed through ‘tough stories’.²⁵ Through confessing for a wider audience a whole different message is conveyed, and different language is chosen.²⁶

The historiography on perpetrator narratives is concentrated on the different types of explanations perpetrators give for their participation in the violence of the past. Several main ‘themes’ of explanation can be identified. The first is heroism or patriotism, perpetrators take pride in their past actions and deem themselves the true heroes of –usually- the nation. In order to mobilise people to condone or participate in violence against their fellow countrymen a regime needs strong factors of persuasion. The necessity of creating an ingroup to which people belong, fighting against an outgroup which poses a threat is already described clearly. In the case of mobilising French revolutionaries in the nineteenth century, Roger Gould established that to mobilise people they need to identify themselves with the cause of the group. Gould calls this the ‘participation identity’. Even though the people might experience different allegiances to different groups, the ‘times of distress’ create an urgent sense of connectedness to the others in the ingroup.²⁷

In the case of state violence, the sense of belonging to the ingroup is equalised with belonging to the state, automatically putting the outgroup outside of the state. Through perpetration of violence this sense of belonging is further strengthened, as Kühne discovered for German soldiers.²⁸ Christopher Browning discovered this same sense of group-socialisation with German police soldiers. Their sense of belonging and group identity and

²⁴ Leigh A. Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence* (Durham and London 2008) 13-15.

²⁵ S. Neitzel and H. Welzer, *Soldaten: over vechten, doden en sterven* (Amsterdam 2012) 11-14.

²⁶ Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*, 19.

²⁷ Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1984 to the Commune* (Chicago 1995) 7-13.

²⁸ Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-1945*, 67-67, 103-104.

solidarity led to them committing crimes they would otherwise not have morally condoned, let alone actively participated in.²⁹ Babajanian seems a similar pattern with Turkish perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide. Their collective identity was under threat and the ingroup (the state) was strengthened by ‘outgrouping’ an enemy, and mobilising the Turkish people against the outgroup. Their collective identity is partly derived from the perpetration of violence.³⁰

The collective identity of the perpetrator group is strong. Therefore, the collective memory and, derived therefrom the narrative, is equally powerful. As the abovementioned authors found out, many perpetrators remained stuck in the language of this identity and therefore the language of the regime they served. They view themselves as the group that defended the nation against internal and foreign enemies, against the ‘intimate enemy’ which posed a direct threat to everything that symbolised the nation state.³¹ Their self-identification and self-representation as hero or true patriot demonstrates either their believe in the former regime and in the existence of the in- and outgroups, or it is a method of justification.

The second theme takes a different direction. Past violence is silenced, completely denied or justified through language of necessity. Stef Scagliola has researched the taboo in the Netherlands on its own military violence used in the Indonesian war of decolonisation between 1945 and 1949. Events of mass violence during this period are often called ‘excesses’ and further research into these episodes of violence are thwarted by both the political elite and the veterans –the perpetrators- involved in this violence.³²

Complete denial is a step even further down the road, the most striking example being Turkey denying the Armenian genocide. The Turkish government today is the most important actor in the state dictating the narrative on the past, prohibiting the acknowledgement of genocide.³³ Rezarta Bilali has found ingroup glorification and perceived threat (both narratives by the Turkish state meant to downplay and justify the violence) lead to less

²⁹ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve police battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (New York 1992) 71-77.

³⁰ Babajanian, ‘Identity and Power in Perpetrating Genocide’, 71-73.

³¹ David Deutsch and Niza Yanay, ‘The politics of intimacy: Nazi and Hutu propaganda as case studies’, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 18:1 (2016) 25-26.

³² Stef Scagliola, *Last van de Oorlog. De Nederlandse oorlogsmisdaden in Indonesië en hun verwerking* (Amsterdam 2002) 290-294. Only in 2017, almost seventy years after the conflict ended, the Dutch government approved a research project into this part of Dutch history. Most veterans remain opposed to further research, continuing the silence on past violence.

³³ Uğur Ümit Üngör, ‘Lost in commemoration: the Armenian genocide in memory and identity’, in: *Patterns of Prejudice* 48:2 (2014) 148.

acknowledgement of ingroup responsibility and less support for reparations for victims. The government sponsored narrative of genocide denial is copied by many Turkish citizens.³⁴

Language of justification is also very common, the perpetrators are not proud or heroic, but they present the violence they committed as a 'necessity'. By presenting the violence as the meaning to an end, the violence is justified and, equally important, the victim is blamed. Julieta Rostica describes this process of justification for the case of Guatemala. The dominant narrative is society, which was and is followed by many individual perpetrators, justifies the violence against civilians as necessary, accusing the civilians of being subversives and guerrilla fighters.³⁵ The fact that many of the victims were women and children (actors even more unlikely to be guerrilla fighters) is ignored or their murder is downplayed as an 'excess'.

The third theme of explanation claims the exact opposite of the first group's heroism: victimhood. The claim to victimhood follows different patterns. Perpetrators can claim to have been victims of the former regime, just as much as their actual victims. Perpetrators claim that a lack of agency (caused by for example their low military rank) or indoctrination have led to their violent actions. Manolo Vela Castañeda has researched the case of low ranking Guatemalan perpetrators. Military training, indoctrination with 'necessary war' propaganda, and racism and prejudices against the victims are among the main explanations of violence. The soldiers' low rank, combined with indoctrination and group pressure leads to the claim that they had no actual agency of choice, and that they were abused by the regime that trained them.³⁶ In Chile, ex-conscripts who has served the Pinochet regime even started to organise themselves to advance their interests and position in society. They saw themselves as having been forced to obey orders, forced to torture, and forced to kill. Their involvement in the regime's violence was not their own choice.³⁷ By claiming victimhood in this way, the past is de-contextualised and their actual victims are ignored. Neitzel and Welzer discover the same pattern with German soldiers. Their lack of agency, not being able to decide for yourself what to do and when to do it, not to be able to make your own observation and interpretation of the situation, and not to be able to act according to that interpretation is argued by many

³⁴ Rezarta Bilali, 'National Narrative and Social Psychological Influences in Turks' Denial of the Mass Killings of Armenians as Genocide', in: *Journal of Social Issues* 69:1 (2013) 16-18, 20, 26.

³⁵ Julieta Rostica, 'The Naturalization of Peace and War: The Hegemonic Discourses on the Political Violence in Guatemala', in: Allier-Montañón, Eugenia and Emilio Crenzel eds., *The struggle for memory in Latin America: recent history and political violence* (New York 2015) 190-192.

³⁶ Manolo E. Vela Castañeda, 'Perpetrators: specialization, willingness, group pressure and incentives. Lessons from the Guatemalan acts of genocide', in: *Journal Of Genocide Research* 18:2-3 (2016) 226, 230-231, 236.

³⁷ Leith Passmore, 'The apolitics of memory: Remembering military service under Pinochet through and alongside transitional justice, truth, and reconciliation', in: *Memory Studies* 9:2 (2016) 175-177.

perpetrators in defence of their own actions.³⁸ This claim to victimhood happens when perpetrators are confronted with a different narrative of the past situation than what the regime has indoctrinated them with at the time of the violence. Stephen Fritz discovered that German Wehrmacht soldiers experienced a sense of delusion and betrayal: the regime had lied to them. The years serving were 'stolen years'. Their previous sentiments of fighting for a good cause and doing their noble duty as a man and a German were completely shattered, along with their pride.³⁹

Closely linked to being a victim of the former regime is some perpetrators' claim to be victims of their own (forced) actions. They experience depression, insomnia and Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, are addicted to alcohol or drugs and unable to provide an income for themselves and their families, due to the memory of the violence they perpetrated. Primo Levi gives the striking example of former 'prisoner-functionaries' in Nazi concentration camps. These people perpetrated some of the most horrific crimes, but their accountability is questionable as they were prisoners just like their victims. Levi calls this the 'grey zone'.⁴⁰ But also perpetrators who are not as obvious in this grey zone claim victimhood through this narrative, Chile's conscripts are an example of this. Payne discusses higher level perpetrators, such as Argentinian army captain Adolfo Scilingo, some of which follow the same narrative.⁴¹

The final 'category of victimhood' claimed by perpetrators is identifying themselves as victims of the new, post-violence, regime. They feel like second class citizens, unequal to the rest of society. The sharp binary between good and evil, between perpetrator and victim, has put them in a position they are not used to: at the bottom of the social ladder. Claire Eldridge demonstrates how the French from the former colony of Algeria, the pied-noir community, presented themselves as victims of decolonisation. The whole narrative of their colonial experience is meant to change the image of them as perpetrators ('colonial masters') into that of victims. Interestingly, they linked their own history to that of another group, the harkis, who were Algerians who had served in the French army. The harkis were generally recognised as victims, by connecting their histories, the pied-noir tried to claim victimhood as well.⁴² Katherina von Kellenbach discusses a different way of victimhood. Perpetrators present themselves as having suffered since the transition of government, for example because

³⁸ Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten: over vechten, doden en sterven*, 30, 93-99.

³⁹ Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten. The German Soldier in World War II* (Kentucky 1995) 223-226.

⁴⁰ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, translated by Raymond Rosenthal (New York 1989) 36-44.

⁴¹ Passmore, 'The apolitics of memory: Remembering military service under Pinochet through and alongside transitional justice, truth, and reconciliation', 175. Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*, 44.

⁴² Claire Eldridge, 'Blurring the boundaries between perpetrators and victims: Pied-noir memories and the harki community', in: *Memory Studies* 3:2 (2010) 124-129.

they have served a prison sentence, are outcasts in society or suffer from physical and psychological problems. They feel ‘cleansed’ by their suffering, but are victimised in society because others still regard them as evil perpetrators.⁴³ Perpetrators identify and present themselves in different ways, ‘performing’ their version of the past for different audiences. These strategic narratives serve different goals, as will be discussed in the next part of this chapter.

Citizenship and power

As is clear from the academic studies mentioned above, perpetrators identify themselves differently, and they choose different ways to present themselves. Through interviews, autobiographies, organised interest groups and politics they give a performance, presenting themselves to an audience. As is characteristic of a performance, a message is sent to the audience, in this case: the rest of society. To convey the message of heroism, victimhood or any other identity that perpetrators try to claim for themselves, the narrative needs to resonate with the rest of society. It needs to reflect and connect with existing ideas in order to be considered legitimate and to be successful to reclaim a position in society. The performance has to restore the moral self of the perpetrator. The political message sent by the perpetrators is definitely not always received positively in society, leading to clashes between different groups, as this next section will demonstrate.

If the perpetrators’ performances are meant to reclaim a position of power - or even just equality - in society, it is important to first establish what it means to be part of society. What does it mean to be a citizen of a state? The Oxford dictionary defines a citizen – very neutrally - as ‘a legally recognized subject or national of a state or commonwealth, either native or naturalized’.⁴⁴ Throughout time other authors have given more substantial definition of the concept. In ancient Greece, Aristoteles thought it was best to define citizenship by the rules a group of people had agreed on to live together. The citizens might be different people, but they have a common goal: the salvation of the state.⁴⁵ In many medieval European cities, to be a citizen meant that you had certain rights, such as protection, and duties, such as tax payment, towards that city. As democracy established itself in the nineteenth and twentieth century, political influence such as being able to vote were included in the rights, but other duties, such as military service were included as well. In the present, to be a citizen means not

⁴³ Katharina von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-War Lives of Nazi Perpetrators* (Oxford 2013) 87-93, 155-156.

⁴⁴ Oxford Dictionary Online, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/citizen>.

⁴⁵ Aristoteles, *Politica*, translation by Benjamin Jowett (Kitchener 1999) book three, part IV.

just to be a legal subject of an area, but you belong to the community of the state, and you share its rights and duties.⁴⁶ Being a citizen demands assimilation to the state's community.⁴⁷ The problematic fact is that the rights and duties, or the responsibilities of a citizen towards the state under the violent, authoritarian regime differ critically from that of the post-violence, democratic regime. The ideas of community and citizenship, and which actions are right and wrong, are not the same.

This new identity or construction of citizenship deserves more explanation, as citizenship is, as obvious from above, not a static concept. The concept is not necessarily national anymore, you can be a European or a global citizen, partly choosing your own allegiance. The globalisation of human rights discourse has furthermore changed the concept of citizenship. Kamari Clark and Mark Goodale explain these globalisation effects as encounters between different (national and international or transnational) "normativities". The language of human rights is universal, opposed to local or national ideas of what justice means. These encounters lead to new ideas of justice, the treatment of people and, closely related, the meaning of citizenship.⁴⁸ Good citizenship is more related to human rights, as a citizen you have these rights, violating them puts you outside of the community of citizens. The dominant narrative of the past is more and more based on human rights violations. The binary line between victims and perpetrators is further crystallised along the same human rights narrative.⁴⁹ The state's new government and the new community of citizens is based on this discourse. The government legitimises itself through the redemption of victims and punishment of perpetrators of human rights violations.

As is clear, those who belong in the new, post-violent state are recognised in the new state narrative, thereby legitimising them while delegitimising the former perpetrator group. The public construction of the past follows the line of good versus evil, of victim versus perpetrator.⁵⁰ This national identity and narrative are further built and crystallised through symbolism and public commemorations.⁵¹ The construction of the past was centrally focussed on credit and blame. Charles Tilly created the idea of a 'justice detector': who is to blame is

⁴⁶ Maurice Roche, 'Citizenship, social theory, and social change', in: *Theory and Society* 16 (1987) 363-365.

⁴⁷ Anouk de Koning, Rivke Jaffe and Martijn Koster, 'Citizenship agendas in and beyond the nation-state: (en)countering framings of the good citizen', in: *Citizenship Studies* 19:2 (2015) 125.

⁴⁸ Kamari Maxine Clarke and Mark Goodale, *Mirrors of Justice. Law and Power in the Post-Cold War Era* (Cambridge 2010) 3-7, 11.

⁴⁹ Michael Humphrey, 'From Victim to Victimhood: Truth Commissions and Trials as Rituals of Political Transition and Individual Healing,' in: *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 14:2 (2003) 171-172.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Dunnage, 'Perpetrator memory and memories about perpetrators', in: *Memory Studies* 3:2 (2010) 91-94.

⁵¹ Johanna Ray Vollhardt and Michal Bilewicz, 'After the Genocide: Psychological Perspectives on Victim, Bystander, and Perpetrator Groups', in: *Journal of Social Issues* 69:1 (2013) 2-5.

determined by who had, or is perceived to have had, responsibility, agency and competence to have committed the crime.⁵² This aspect of perceived agency is important, whether or not perpetrators actually had agency does not matter, they are demonised and side-lined in society. Several transitional justice matters such as truth commission further strengthen the narrative of the victors, and delegitimise any other narratives and memories. Lisa Laplante and Kimberley Theidon have researched the Peruvian truth commission and memorialisation. Perpetrators were completely left out of the truth search. Their part of the story was ignored, including their motivations and perceptions.⁵³ They were side-lined as evil demons instead of incorporated as political actors in the history of the violence. Root causes of the conflict are ignored and the conflict becomes de-contextualised, a “victors’ justice”. The subsequent hierarchy in society is not a construction that improves lasting peace, as it denies a part of society their memories.

Interestingly, perpetrators seem to be appropriating this human rights discourse for their own advancement. Cynthia Milton explains the Peruvian case where two groups of perpetrators exist, the government and the rebel group Sendero Luminoso. The same political elite still controls the government. It still demonises the rebel group as the only perpetrator in the public narrative on the past. While the government presents its own actions as heroic performances in need to protect the state, and propagated this image in the media, museums and through education. It holds the rebels responsible for the human rights violations and effectively rids itself responsibility.⁵⁴

Although the narratives on the past are not static, breaking or even blurring the boundary between victims and perpetrators proves difficult. The hierarchy in society remains strong, and ‘non-established victims’ cannot join the societal position of victimhood without a struggle. Global discourse on victimhood has influenced national discourse the same way human rights discourse has. Ideas of what a victim is, who is deserving of – what Susan Hirsch calls - ‘global justice’ are more and more established through international tribunals and in the international press.⁵⁵

⁵² Charles Tilly, *Credit and Blame* (Princeton 2008) 35-37.

⁵³ Lisa J. Laplante, and Kimberley Theidon, ‘Commissioning Truth, Constructing Silences: The Peruvian Truth Commission and the Other Truths of ‘Terrorists’, in: Kamari Clarke and Mark Goodale eds., *Mirrors of Justice. Law and Power in the Post-Cold War Era* (Cambridge 2010) 297-301.

⁵⁴ Cynthia E. Milton, ‘Curating memories of armed state actors in Peru’s era of transitional justice’, in: *Memory Studies* 8:3 (2015) 363-365.

⁵⁵ Susan F. Hirsch, ‘The Victim Deserving of Global Justice: Power, Caution and Recovering Individuals’, in: Kamari Clarke and Mark Goodale eds., *Mirrors of Justice. Law and Power in the Post-Cold War Era* (Cambridge 2010) 149-151.

The top-down construction of victimhood is also dominant on the national level. As already discussed, transitional justice measures crystallise the narrative in society. Onur Bakiner argues that the social and political embeddedness of a truth commission gives it a major power position, especially when other institutions in the post conflict society are not yet capable of dealing with the past. The commission determines the narrative and which actors can claim the status of victimhood.⁵⁶ Tshepo Madlingozi takes this argument even further. He argues that transitional justice measures such as truth commissions are ‘entrepreneurs’ advancing the memory of one group versus the other, serving the political goals of the state. Victims are ‘produced’ in the post violent society.⁵⁷ Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern argue that more local participation is necessary, allowing bottom-up truth telling and memorialisation. Only in this way a shared story can be created to promote reconciliation and prevent future conflict.⁵⁸

But who deserves this victim status? Kieran McEvoy and Kirsten McConnachie argue that in the past, victim status has been regarded as the exact opposite of perpetrator status: victimhood demanded complete innocence. This very black and white distinction links the status of victim directly to perpetrators and, therefore, to judicial procedures. The new society “draws a line between worthy and unworthy citizens”. If not complete innocence is ascribed to a certain victim group, they are lower in ‘rank’ in the hierarchy of victimhood.⁵⁹ This battle for victimhood and hierarchy within victimhood is further fought over by victims themselves. As Tazreena Sajjad has discovered for the case of Nepal, there is strong competition between victim groups. She argues that transitional justice institutions have failed to identify the complexity of different victim groups, thereby stripping them of their own political agency. The victim groups themselves competed for the favours of the institutional led measures, establishing their truth as the truth and acquire reparations for their group.⁶⁰

The position of complex victims, those who do not immediately qualify as victims under the innocence criteria but who cannot be singled out as simple perpetrators either, is difficult. Luke Moffet argues that, while they should not be exempted from blame, they need

⁵⁶ Onur Bakiner, ‘One truth among others? Truth commissions’ struggle for truth and memory’, in: *Memory Studies* 8:3 (2015) 345-349.

⁵⁷ Tshepo Madlingozi, ‘On Transitional Justice Entrepreneurs and the Production of Victims’, in: *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2:2 (2010) 210-213.

⁵⁸ Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern, ‘Whose Justice? Rethinking Transitional Justice from the Bottom Up,’ in: *Journal of Law and Society* 35:2 (2008) 270-273.

⁵⁹ Kieran McEvoy and Kirsten McConnachie, ‘Victimology in Transitional Justice: Victimhood, Innocence and Hierarchy,’ in: *European Journal of Criminology* 9:5 (2012) 527-533.

⁶⁰ Tazreena Sajjad, ‘Heavy Hands, Helping Hands, Holding Hands: The Politics of Exclusion in Victims’ Networks in Nepal’, in: *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 10 (2016) 25-26, 29-31.

to be recognised, their narrative heard and they should be able to qualify for reparations. Especially with this group, the danger of not recognising them might lead to the creation of a group of outcasts, ready to stir up future violence.⁶¹ The same can count for perpetrators. Recognising that some of them are also partly victims does not exempt them from blame, but acknowledges the need for reconciliation in society. Reconciliation for which you need victims, perpetrators and every actor in between.

The most serious obstacle for making victimhood a more fluid concept and including more people in the identity of victim is one group of people: the people who are currently recognised as victims. Virginia Vecchioli has argued that in the case of Argentina, the concept of victim has extended to different groups over the years. New social constructions, debate and often juridical procedures led to this extension of victim status. However, the ‘new victims’ gained a ‘lower rank’ in the victim hierarchy, as they were for example not victims of the military Junta but victims of the previous government. The concept of victim became more fluid, although it never extended to perpetrators.⁶² Furthermore, as a victim, granting other people victim status, incorporates them into the same identity group as your own. Perpetrators presenting themselves is a performance, but the same counts for victims forgiving perpetrators, or victims -partially- acknowledging victimhood in perpetrators. The concept of victimhood and who belongs to it works as mobilising force in society. It influences the narrative on the past, memorialisation of the past, reparations and trials to deal with the past. Victims keep or grant agency by sharing and recognising victimhood status of others, influencing both justice and reconciliation in society.

Methodological framework

As seen above, many authors have discussed perpetrator testimonies, the concepts of citizenship and victimhood, perpetrator-victim dynamics and societal hierarchy in post-conflict, post-authoritarian societies. This thesis aims to fill the gap between perpetrator narratives of self-identification and self-legitimation, dynamics in society and the changing concepts of victimhood and citizenship. To link the perpetrator narratives to these dynamics I will research different sources, including oral and written testimonies by individual perpetrators and perpetrator organisations, interviews and autobiographies. This final section provides a methodological framework on how to interpret these sources.

⁶¹ Luke Moffett, ‘Reparations for ‘Guilty Victims’: Navigating Complex Identities of Victim–Perpetrators in Reparation Mechanisms’, in: *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 10 (2016) 149-155.

⁶² Virginia Vecchioli, ‘Por una aproximación política a la justicia transicional: creación, circulación y usos de la categoría víctima en los dispositivos de justicia transicional en la Argentina’, in: *Jurídicas* 2:10 (2013) 17-18.

Leigh Payne introduces the concept of ‘contentious coexistence’ in her study of perpetrator confessions. This is the interaction between perpetrators’ narratives (their political speech) and the wider context. It is the parallel coexistence of perpetrator testimonies, and their audience’s narratives and memory. In their quest for political power, perpetrator narratives’ legitimacy depends on what words are used (script), the way they are said (act), and where and when they are said (stage and timing) and the group in society the performance is meant for (audience).⁶³ As their audience comprises (family of) victims, human rights activists, former regime members and supporters and every group in between, the narrative perpetrators construct and performance they give is not received the same by all of them. Furthermore, the perpetrator narratives may be used by other groups in society to strengthen their own narrative, and improve their own status in society. Stories of remorse may be used by victim groups to strengthen their narrative of victimhood, while stories of heroism may empower former regime supporters in their sense of righteousness. This interplay between perpetrator narratives and their reception in society will be further researched in my case studies of Argentina and Rwanda.

Perpetrators may use different techniques to convey their message or to ‘perform their narrative’. The way the past is framed and the way perpetrators frame themselves is a very important aspect. Erving Goffman argued that the way a story is framed is always socially, with a meaning. Within the frame the focus can be on one aspect, while disguising other aspects. This can be applied to narratives of the past, for example putting emphasis on the outcome of an action, disguising the methods, but also on a personal level. Presenting oneself as a religious or a family man might disguise your past as a torturer in a prison.⁶⁴ Closely related to this way of framing is the concept of ‘cognitive dissonance’. People view the past or themselves completely different from the actual situation. By, for example de-contextualising the past perpetrators can obscure what actually happened and change a story to their benefit. By singling out one event of heroism or victimhood, perpetrators de-contextualise their general role of violent or otherwise wrong behaviour.⁶⁵

Using metaphors can have the same effect, for example a ‘cleaning operation’ frames an event completely different from ‘selecting people for imprisonment, torture and murder’. Kenney Scott discovered several uses of metaphors to present victimhood, which include: (1)

⁶³ Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*, 4-5.

⁶⁴ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis. An essay on the organization of experience* (Harmondsworth 1974) 21-26.

⁶⁵ Lim, ‘Victimhood Nationalism in Contested Memories: National Mourning and Global Accountability’, 140-141. Interestingly, victims have a similar strategy of over-contextualising the past. The suffering is emphasised, neglecting possible episodes of their own wrongdoing or guilt.

permanent loss of future; (2) being personally affected and devastated; (3) being a 'different person now'; (4) loss of control; and (5) loss of innocence. Metaphors are generally used to transfer the meaning of an otherwise inexpressible situation, but perpetrators can use them to present themselves differently from the actual past events. To present themselves as victims.⁶⁶

Besides disguising the past and their own role in it, perpetrators may express very different sentiments as well. Feelings of guilt and shame being the most 'appealing' when trying to reclaim favours of your fellow countrymen. June Tangney and Jeff Stuwig state that guilt demonstrates regret over a certain action in the past, the person expressing guilt wishes the past events could be undone. Feelings of guilt thereby motivate empathy and reparative behaviour such as confessing and apologizing. Feelings of shame however refer to the moral self-worth of a person. The person's core identity becomes uncertain. These feelings impede empathy and often leads to defensiveness, denial of moral responsibility, silencing of specific parts of the past, self-legitimation and even victim blaming.⁶⁷ This clash with reality and the moral self-worth is also extensively researched by Fritz, who researched the German Wehrmacht soldiers' confrontation with their role in the violence of the Second World War. Besides the realisation that their own actions had not been for a noble cause, which led to feelings of guilt and shame, the entire (Nazi) worldview they attained was shattered. All of their former values had been condemned. This confrontation led to other feelings as well, feeling of betrayal. Perpetrators felt betrayed by the former regime they served who had lied to them. Others felt betrayed by their fellow countrymen for lack of support in the post war years.⁶⁸ These feelings of betrayal have led to confessions, in their turn betraying their former self, fellow soldiers and officers, denying agency over their own past actions and claiming victimhood of the former regime.⁶⁹ Sentiments of betrayal by the new regime may however also stimulate narratives of heroism. Kellenbach however contends that the experienced shift from sacrificial hero (under the authoritarian regime) to despised scapegoat (under the new regime) signals the collapse of the national collective pride and increased the sense of isolation and betrayal among Nazi perpetrators.⁷⁰

As demonstrated extensively in the previous section, perpetrators perform their narratives in many different ways, based on different sentiments and purposes, through

⁶⁶ Kenney J. Scott, 'Metaphors of Loss: Murder, Bereavement, Gender, and Presentation of the 'Victimized' Self', in: *International Review of Victimology* 9 (2002) 219-222.

⁶⁷ June Price Tangney and Jeff Stuwig, 'A Moral-Emotional Perspective on Evil Persons and Evil Deeds', in: Arthur Miller ed., *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil* (New York/ London 2005) 328-333. Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-War Lives of Nazi Perpetrators*, 137-139.

⁶⁸ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten. The German Soldier in World War II*, 222-226.

⁶⁹ Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*, 269-270.

⁷⁰ Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-War Lives of Nazi Perpetrators*, 117-124.

performances based on different audiences. They claim a new position in society through their language. They can use the language of the old regime, claiming heroism and patriotism, feeling betrayed by the new state and not showing any empathy for their victims. The other way around they adapt the language of the new regime, expressing guilt or remorse to reposition themselves in the new society. Through some strategy, the perpetrators legitimise themselves in the past and claim citizenship in the new society. The following two chapters will examine perpetrators in Argentina and Rwanda, respectively, on their strategies of self-identification, representation and legitimisation. The chapters will discuss how these stories are adapted to the changed narratives on the past and changing ideas of citizenship, and how these narratives are dealt with in their respective societies.

Argentina

This chapter will first give an overview of Argentina's violent history of the 1970s and 1980s and analyse the dominant narratives and official remembrance in the Argentinian society on this period of violence, specifically on the last military dictatorship of 1976 to 1983. In the second part of this chapter I will analyse the self-representative and self-legitimising narratives by perpetrators on this period and, their own role in the history of the military repression and the meaning they assign to past events. The third part of chapter will focus on how the meaning of these narratives relate to the changing narrative in the Argentinean society. How have the perpetrator narratives shifted over time and how do the changes in these narratives relate to the changing narratives in society? How have perpetrators used language and narrative to position themselves differently in the new society, and reclaim their citizenship?

Interpreting the past: memory and narrative

Argentina has a long history of violence, coups, dictatorships, social protest and guerrillas. The last military junta to rule the country was the '*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*', which took control of the country on the 24th of March 1976, led by General Jorge Videla. The military junta, in altering compositions of leaders, remained in power up till 1983, when a severe economic crisis and the failure of the Falkland war against the British made the position of the military leadership untenable. The 1976 coup was in the first place a response to the ongoing civil unrest between the army and Marxist guerrilla groups who had been fighting each other vigorously since the early 1970s. The political leadership at that time, controlled by Isabel Martinez de Perón, the widow of Juan Perón who died in July 1974, could not handle the situation, which made Videla believe the coup was necessary to save the country from chaos.⁷¹

The period between 1976 and 1983 is characterised by overall terror in the Argentinean society. The two most active guerrilla movements, the Montoneros and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), fought against the Argentine army. The repression carried out by the army, however, was disproportional to the danger these guerrillas posed. The military's system of repression extended to a larger group than (suspected) guerrilla fighters, called 'subversives' or 'terrorists'. Everyone considered a political opponent,

⁷¹ Interview with Jorge Rafael Videla by: Ricardo Angoso, 'In Argentina there is no justice, but revenge, which is quite another thing', published in: *Cambio*, 20-2-2012.

ideological dissident, critical student, union member or people simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time could be in danger of being kidnapped, detained, tortured and/or murdered. The period of military repression is further distinguished by some of its gruesome methods. People were kidnapped and held in clandestine detention centres, some of the well know detention centres which will come back later in this chapter are the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) and La Perla. Many were held for long periods of time, and tortured during interrogations. Babies born to imprisoned women were taken from their mothers and given in ‘adoption’ to families who sympathised with the military. Some people were eventually released, but many were never seen again. Execution methods varied from firing squads to throwing people alive out of airplanes over the Atlantic Ocean. These targeted people, many of whose faith is still unknown, are called the *desaparecidos*, the disappeared ones.⁷²

The first dominant narrative on the violence is the narrative of war against dangerous subversive elements and terrorists, as advocated by the armed forces and the junta during and immediately after the period of violence.⁷³ The term ‘Dirty War’ was used, implying a war between two armed forces. The armed forces were the ones who had waged this war of counterinsurgency or counterterrorism against the armed enemy. The guerrillas, who had tried to ‘take over power in the country’ were the ones to blame for the violence, victimising the entire Argentinean nation. The army defended the country. The junta presented a document in 1983, the ‘Documenta final del junta militar sobre la guerra contra la subversion y el terrorismo’ (final document of the junta on the war against subversives and terrorism) to narrate their story on the violent years. They frame the past as a ‘struggle for freedom, justice and the right to life’.⁷⁴ The *desaparecidos* were all considered to have belonged to the terrorist and subversive groups, they were casualties of war, not victims of violence. When stories on disappearances and murder (out of combat situations) did come out they were presented as excesses or errors linked to the dirty war.⁷⁵ The narrative, as advocated by the junta and military which were the dominant actors in society at the time, clearly downplayed the violent events that characterise this period in the Argentinean history.

The first democratic government, led by president Raúl Alfonsín, immediately installed a truth commission in 1983, the CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre la

⁷² Ton Robben, ‘Vuile oorlog, staatsterreur of genocide? De Argentijnse worsteling met de herinnering aan de militaire dictatuur van 1976-1983’, in: *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 35:1 (2011) 530-532.

⁷³ Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity*, 88.

⁷⁴ Documenta final del junta militar sobre la guerra contra la subversion y el terrorismo’ (April 1983).

⁷⁵ Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity*, 89-91.

Desaparición de Personas), which presented its report on the junta led years '*Nunca Más*' in 1984. The report estimated that approximately 8,000 people had 'disappeared', dead or still alive was not known or specified. Human rights organisations however provide higher estimations, approximately 30,000 people are claimed to have disappeared.⁷⁶ The report includes over 50,000 pages of documents and testimonies by 379 people, mostly victims.⁷⁷ In the introduction of the report, the framework of 'dirty war' is continued, both the military and the guerrillas were presented as guilty of the violence. *Nunca Más* gained a canonical status in Argentina, widely sold and read by many. This theory of 'two demons' would dominate the narrative on the junta period, excusing the rest of society from blame.

However, the story became more nuanced. *Nunca Más* openly considered the repressive violence used by the military disproportional to the danger posed by the guerrillas.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the report had exposed the scale of the violence and crimes committed during this period. The narratives of 'excesses' and 'errors' were proven wrong. The large amount of victims of kidnapping, torture and murder could never just be guerrilla combatants involved in the Dirty War, leading to further incrimination of the military.⁷⁹ Although the report was officially not meant to determine responsibility, after the publication it was easy to consider the junta as such. The publication of the report enabled the start of the trials of the junta. Between 1985 and 1987 the nine prominent members of the junta were prosecuted and convicted for their role in the violence, mostly based on the testimonies incorporated in the report. Interestingly, no guerrilla members were indicted whatsoever. Only one of the 'two-demons' was considered guilty enough to prosecute.

The *Nunca Más* report may have helped crystallise the narrative of victims, it did not lead to a single, dominant narrative on the past, agreed upon by the entire Argentinean society. The military and their sympathisers continued to propagate their narrative of having protected Argentina from Marxism and other untraditional, unchristian dangers. Economic crisis and hyperinflation created unrest in society in the late 1980, and the chaos was further stimulated by protests of military bands who opposed the prosecution of member of the armed forces. To calm down the protests and to appease the military the government passed the Full Stop law (1986) and Due Obedience law (1987). The laws put a stop to the claims filed by (families of) victims against members of the army and excused all but high ranking officers

⁷⁶ Robben, 'Vuile oorlog, staatsterreur of genocide? De Argentijnse worsteling met de herinnering aan de militaire dictatuur van 1976-1983', 530.

⁷⁷ Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina disappearances: the political history of "Nunca más"*, 80-91.

⁷⁸ *Nunca Más*, Report by Argentina's National Commission on Disappeared People (London 1986), translation of original report '*Nunca Más*, Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (Buenos Aires 1984), 1-2.

⁷⁹ Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity*, 89-93.

from crimes as they were acting out of obedience to their superiors. The next president, Carlos Menem, who had taken over in 1989, even went as far as to grant amnesty to the convicted perpetrators. The perpetrators responsible for a large part of the violence, such as Videla himself, were free again.⁸⁰

This attempt at reconciliation failed. Society responded with even more protest against the impunity of perpetrators. Human rights and victim organisations such as Madres- and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio) gained more credibility in society and were able to create a counter narrative against top down imposed impunity. Besides protests, these groups organised other ways of truth finding and fighting impunity. Truth trials were held, in which perpetrators could not be convicted but whereabouts of missing people or their bodies were discovered. The search of the grandmothers for their grandchildren born in detention centres further stimulated the dialogue on the crimes committed in the detention centres by the army and junta, and even led to the adaption of a law in 1997 on the right to know your biological family.⁸¹ H.I.J.O.S went even further, they organised rituals of public shaming, known as *escraches*, to make the people in the neighbourhood aware that a perpetrator was living amongst them, and to warn the perpetrator he was being watched.⁸²

The success these groups had in stimulating dialogue and creating space for narratives of victims, combined with the first narratives by the first perpetrators who spoke publicly out on the violent period (more on these narratives in the next part of this chapter) and a globalising awareness of human rights and human rights violations⁸³ led to a new dominant narrative in society: the narrative of state terror. This new master narrative of state terrorism and human rights violations by the state was further propagated by the new president Nestor Kirchner, who came to power in 2003. Kirchner had an ‘anti-establishment’ attitude and during his election campaign he promised justice for the crimes committed by the state between 1976 and 1983. When he became president he annulled both the Full Stop Law and de Due Obedience Law and declared the amnesties and pardons given to convicted perpetrators unconstitutional.⁸⁴ From 2006, new trials were held against junta members and (former) members of the military. Furthermore, besides reopening court room trials to obtain justice, the Kirchner administration created a new edition of *Nunca Más*. A new prologue

⁸⁰ Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity*, 57-69.

⁸¹ Civil Code Argentina, Law 24779, article 328.

⁸² Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity*, 57-69.

⁸³ Clarke and Goodale, *Mirrors of Justice. Law and Power in the Post-Cold War Era*, 3-7, 11.

⁸⁴ Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity*, 69-80.

denounced the two-demon theory in favour of the state terror narrative and condemned the impunity that had reigned in society.⁸⁵ The state and its army were the only ones responsible for the violence, crystallising the binary victim-perpetrator division of good and evil in society.

The narrative evolved even further from state terror and human rights violations to a narrative of genocide. The official definition of genocide, as given by the United Nations, does not include violence against political groups (as opposed to national, ethnic, racial or religious groups).⁸⁶ However, in the narrative of state terror (as opposed to the war narrative of two-demon theory) the violence was aimed at –mostly– civilians. The presentation of victims in a de-contextualised and de-politicised manner in the *Nunca Más* report and by the victim organisations, for example by focussing on their personal family stories instead of on their political affiliation further enhanced the story of innocent, civilian victims. The junta and military repression were aimed at eradicating an entire identity group along with their social structure within society, reorganising the nation of Argentina.⁸⁷ This opens the door to considering these crimes human rights violations. The fact that babies were stolen and transferred to a different group (which is included in the UN genocide convention) strengthened this argument and narrative.

De-contextualising the conflict strengthened the binary model of good and evil however, through this de-contextualisation the memory and narrative of a large part of society becomes absent. The perpetrators stories are left out, but the victims stories lack context as well. It gives no explanation on why the violence started in the first place, nor what society can do to prevent future conflict, nor is reconciliation brought closer. The latest developments in Argentina's dominant narrative have taken a different direction. The new president Mauricio Macri, who succeeded the Kirchners in 2015, has a more ambiguous view on the past, doubting the amount of 30.000 desaparecidos and reopening the door to the dirty war narrative.⁸⁸

As is clear, coming to terms with the past and establishing a narrative on what happened is not easy. Argentina suffered a cultural trauma, the history of the violence left a

⁸⁵ Crenzel, *Memory of the Argentina disappearances: the political history of "Nunca más"*, 138-140. And Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity*, 119-127.

⁸⁶ United Nations, Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948).

⁸⁷ Daniel Feierstein, 'Political Violence in Argentina and its genocidal aspects', in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 8:2 (2006) 152-153.

⁸⁸ Uki Goñi, 'Blaming the victims: dictatorship denialism is on the rise in Argentina', in: *The Guardian*, August 29, 2016. Accessed on April 25, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/29/argentina-denial-dirty-war-genocide-mauricio-macri#img-1>

permanent mark on the country's history and on the identity of the Argentinean people. This cultural trauma was however different for the different groups. The dominant narrative proves not static. It changed along with changes in politics (both national and international) and other actors such as human rights organisations and the military. These actors can create critical junctures which lead to changes in the dominant narrative. The military protests in the late 1980s, the activities by human rights and victim organisations in 1990s and the presidency of Kirchner are all critical junctures. Their momentum led to different narratives being dominant and promoted by the majority of society.

These different narratives provide different ideas on who is a perpetrator, to what extent different perpetrators are responsible and who can be considered a victim. Directly related to this division is the place memories have in society. Victims' memories are legitimised and recognised, and form a 'memory regime'. The national narrative is based on their victimhood. Experiences, memories and narratives of the other group are removed from the public sphere. The next part of this chapter will research the way the 'others', the perpetrators, structure their narrative on the past and specifically, on their own role in the past and how this is affected by the dominant narrative in society.

Framing the past, presenting the self

This part forms the analysis of testimonies by twenty-eight perpetrators, all soldiers of different ranks in the Argentinian military between 1976 and 1983 (although most served for a much longer period, including the period before and after the last junta). The way they frame the past, the violence, themselves within the past and the present, and the way they justify the violent events and themselves are central in this part. Furthermore, publications by four organisations that fight for the legal rights of the perpetrator group in Argentinian society are included to incorporate the way perpetrators have organised themselves as group and how they represent themselves as a group.⁸⁹

Heroism and pride

As discussed in the methodological framework, perpetrators take different attitudes towards framing the past and themselves. A frame often used is the frame of heroism, whether it is to be a national hero protecting the country, a protector of the people and its traditions and

⁸⁹ The testimonies quoted in this thesis are exemplary, due to limited space I am not able to use all the confessions and striking quotes I have found in the sources. Appendix I provides an overview of the collected sources and the type of representations and legitimisations found in these sources.

culture, or heroism as a soldier, doing your duty with true military honour. As it is impossible to present yourself as hero when accused of having repressed and killed civilians, perpetrators need a new narrative to present themselves as hero. The narrative on the past in which this representation as hero is constructed focusses on the violence as a war with equal opponents. Captain Alfredo Astiz, who has served in the intelligence department of the army at the Buenos Aires ESMA detention centre explains himself and the conflict as follows, when interviewed for magazine *Tres Puntos* in 1998: *“They were the enemy. I had a lot of hate inside of me. They had killed 2000 of us. Do you know why a soldier kills? For different things: love of the country, ‘machismo’, pride, obedience. If those sentiments are not very high, one cannot do this work on a day to day basis.”*⁹⁰ The conflict was a war, with a distinct enemy. A true soldier in a war fights for the love of his country and for pride, and follows orders. During his trial in 2011 for his involvement in the ESMA detention centre, Astiz continued to hold on to this narrative: *“I listened with amazement to the illegitimate statements [by the prosecutors] that in our country terrorists were not terrorists, but “militant youth”, “idealistic youth”, “trade union activists” or even more incredibly “political”. Given the more than 21,000 terrorist attacks suffered by our country, a large part of them during a constitutional government, which left more than 3,000 victims, that argument, that they were “politicians” and that they sought an “egalitarian society”, is therefore ridiculous, a thesis impossible to understand and even less to sustain.”*⁹¹ At different ‘stages’, an interview and a court trial, Astiz continued his line of representation. Within this narrative of war, ESMA intelligence officer Juan Carlos Rolón framed himself as a similar type of hero. When questioned by the Senate in 1994, before he could be promoted in the navy, he presents himself as a true soldier, protecting his motherland: *“I believe I have fulfilled the duties of the Navy, and fulfilling those duties at a time that I had to integrate the task forces that were in charge of the repression of terrorism. I fulfilled it as an act of service, convinced of what I was doing and, above all, that we would be able to restore the democratic way of life of Argentina”.*⁹² Furthermore, Rolón and Astiz both testified in first person speech, they say “I” instead of “we” or “one”, taking pride in their actions.

The perpetrators position themselves in the middle of the events, not hiding or concealing actions, but proud of what they did in service to the nation. By presenting themselves as national heroes they follow the line of explanation given by higher superiors in

⁹⁰ Interview Alfredo Astiz by Gabriella Cerrutti, published in *Tres Puntos*, January 16, 1998.

⁹¹ Final words of captain Alfredo Astiz in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011. Accessed through *Asi se publico*.

⁹² Testimony Juan Carlos Rolón in the Argentinean Senate, October 19, 1994.

the army. General and member of the last Junta Christino Nicolaides framed, during the 1985 junta trial, the conflict very similar: *“The subversives fought to take over power in the country and impose a left wing regime totally opposed to the traditions of our country, our national way of life. We, the armed forces, in this serious situation, had the mandate to stop this aspiration to take over the power, and we succeeded.”*⁹³

A second element prominent in the war narrative testimonies is the meaning of military ethics and obedience. ESMA lieutenant Antonio Pernías explains the military system in his final words of the ESMA trial in 2011: *“I would like to make clear, that those who execute the war obey directives and orders prepared by the superior levels. [...] This is due obedience! If there is no obedience due, no military plan can be executed nor political decisions in war be fulfilled”*.⁹⁴ The self-representation of loyal soldier through the argument of obedience is also used by lieutenant colonel Guillermo Enrique Bruno Laborda, who made a public confession in 2004. He states that the actions took place under “legitimate orders and superior directives”, to fulfil these orders was to prove your “loyalty, obedience and professionalism” as a soldier.⁹⁵ The perpetrators who frame themselves in this narrative legitimise themselves through their service to the former regime, and through their service to society. Even a perpetrator who was already convicted of war crimes during the ESMA trial in 2011, framed himself similarly, appealing to the people by representing himself as a loyal war hero who has only served the nation when its people cried out for help. Captain Eugenio B. Vilardo wrote a public card from prison in 2015 (published by the organisation Union de Promociones which will be discussed later) titled ‘God why did you leave me?’:

“Leaving aside my personal convictions, I was careful to fulfil my duty in support of the President of the Nation with efficiency and loyalty, as dictated by our code of ethics. The country was a chaos. The terrorist armed bands dominated the streets, the terror spread throughout the national territory. We received dramatic reports from the interior of the country: in Tucuman these groups took towns, hoisted flags unrelated to ours, set up people's prisons and murdered peasants who did not comply with the terrorist directives. Bombings in companies, school blasts, barracks attacks, arms theft, murder of police and military were commonplace. The people asked for the intervention of the armed forces”.⁹⁶

Putting his own feelings aside, he served the motherland from a terrorist threat, fulfilled his duties by following the orders he was given and provided the support the people of the

⁹³ Testimony Christino Nicolaides, Trial of the Junta April 24, 1985, in: *Diario del Juicio* 22-26 April 1985.

⁹⁴ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Pernías in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011. Accessed through [Asi se publico](#).

⁹⁵ Horacio Verbitsky, ‘Mancha Penenosa’, in: *Pagina/12* June 9, 2004.

⁹⁶ Eugenio B. Vilardo, ‘God why did you leave me?’ (July 2015). Accessed through [Union de Promociones](#).

country had asked for, and needed. Even though he was already imprisoned, Vilardo still tries to appeal to the citizens of Argentina, legitimising himself by reminding them of their own past. The perpetrators present authority as strictly vertical, but positively so. They present this authority and obedience as requirements for a functional army. Their worth as a soldier partly even depended on their loyalty and obedience.

Some cracks in this narrative of heroism and pride however show as well. Being a true hero, patriot or loyal soldier came at a high price. Navy captain Adolfo Scilingo states the following during his public confession in 1995, which consisted of multiple interviews with journalist Horacio Verbitsky. Confessions which were published in a book and read nationwide. *“We received extreme orders, but coherent to the war that was being waged, both to stop the enemy and to eliminate the enemy”*.⁹⁷ Scilingo considers the orders he was given beyond normal military conduct, but the war narrative is used to justify the orders, and the fact that he obeyed them. Sometimes perpetrators try to defend this military and personal honour through denial of events. Astiz, for example, responds to the question whether he participated in the kidnapping or stealing of babies: *“No never, and the fact that you ask me upsets me a lot. This is my point of discussion. I returned babies [to their grandparents or other family]. It was the basic rule we had to comply with concerning the Montoneros. Do not mess with their kids or family”*.⁹⁸ Astiz defends himself by claiming to have had the moral high ground when it came to the treatment of civilians. Pernías makes a similar claim in his testimony before the Senate in 1994, when discussing the missions he participated in: *“It had to be finished as soon as possible, the procedures were ordered. But I, on my level, tried to do things as humanly as possible”*.⁹⁹

A third element within the framework of patriotism, heroism and pride is the way the enemies (or the victims) are represented. Rolón testified before the Senate that the violence was legitimised: *“But let us not forget that Argentina had the largest urban guerrilla in the history of the world”*.¹⁰⁰ Vilardo frames the war as a conflict for which the local police and security personnel was not prepared: *“The military intervention was ordered by decree in the fight against the terrorism”*.¹⁰¹ Captain Ricardo Cavallo, convicted in 2011 for his role in the ESMA detention centre, frames the enemy during the trial as “the terrorists” and delegitimises

⁹⁷ Confesion Adolfo Scilingo published in: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires 1995).

⁹⁸ Interview Alfredo Astiz by Gabriella Cerrutti, published in *Tres Puntos*, January 16, 1998.

⁹⁹ Testimony Antonio Pernías in the Argentinean Senate, October 19,1994.

¹⁰⁰ Testimony Juan Carlos Rolón in the Argentinean Senate, October 19,1994.

¹⁰¹ Eugenio B. Vilardo, ‘God why did you leave me?’ (July 2015).

the victimhood narrative of his enemy in the same sentence: “*You [the court] say the ‘social militants’ or the like*”.¹⁰²

The argument of having done your duty, and having protected your country is further emphasised by the way the outcome of the conflict is framed. Pernías states during his final words in the 2011 ESMA trial: “*After the end of the war, there was no more terrorism - and never again an indiscriminate and miserable bomb - the wounds and aftermath of the war have already healed for more than 20 years. The country is ruled in coexistence, peace and harmony*”.¹⁰³ As described, these narratives are ‘performed’ at different stages: interviews, trials and senate hearings. While you might expect a different narrative in court than in the newspapers, the perpetrator narratives on heroism are everywhere. At different stages and at different times perpetrators have presented themselves as heroes of the nation, having defended the country and its people from danger. They had served the country, and are rightful citizens of the nation, as its protectors. This narrative of heroism and patriotism stands in sharp contrast to the self-representation and framing central in the next part: silence and denial.

Denial, silence and justification

A different mode of self-representation and self-legitimation is through the silencing of the past, downplaying or justifying what happened, or through straight forward denial of the events. Carlos Capdevila, sentenced during the 2011 ESMA trial for his involvement as a military doctor at the ESMA, makes the following closing statement during the trial: “*I know of no medical information or records about tortured persons, not even verbally. I have not seen anyone tortured*”.¹⁰⁴ Even after many witnesses, mostly former detainees at the ESMA, who had recognised him and testified against him, Capdevila still pleaded not guilty, and denied all knowledge of torture and human rights violations. Salvio Menendez, who had been stationed at the ESMA, goes even further as to deny all the testimonies of ESMA prisoners. During the trial of the junta in 1985, he states: “*During the period I was there, there were no prisoners at ESMA*”.¹⁰⁵ During the 1985 trial of the junta, vice admiral Antonio Vanek and brigadier Jesus Orlando Cappellini make similar statements. They deny the entire existence of clandestine prisons. Cappellini chose his words very carefully: “*I had no knowledge of*

¹⁰² Final words of captain Ricardo Cavallo in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011. Accessed through Asi se publico.

¹⁰³ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Pernías in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Final words of Carlos Capdevila in the ESMA trial, October 13, 2011. Accessed through Asi se publico.

¹⁰⁵ Testimony Salvio Menendez, Trial of the Junta April 24, 1985, in: *Diario del Juicio* 22-26 April 1985.

anything immoral going on during the anti-subversive fight".¹⁰⁶ Whether denying events, or denying their own participation in or knowledge of those events, the perpetrators delegitimise the victims' narratives and legitimise their own righteousness.

Juan Rolón specifies his denial. Before the senate Rolón denies his participation in what he calls admiral Massera's 'political activities' (referring to the illegal detained prisoners). *"I want to make it clear that when I was ordered to participate, I categorically refused."* Rolón clarifies his denial even further, explaining his refusal of orders in contrast to his previous statement that he was not in a position to refuse orders: *"The difference is that one order was a military order for military operations, while the other had a political connotation"*.¹⁰⁷ Rolón contradicts himself on the ability or inability to refuse orders, making his testimony as a performance less credible. Other testimonies take a personal turn as well. Captain Pablo Garcia Velasco denies his presence at the ESMA at times of crimes, stating that he was assigned elsewhere.¹⁰⁸ Captain Alberto Eduardo González, who was located at the ESMA detention centre, does not deny the atrocities that took place. He does vigorously deny his own participation, arguing that he was out of the county during the Santa Cruz kidnapping for which he was to be convicted: *"I will not use the time to ask for mercy, because I cannot regret what I did not even do"*.¹⁰⁹ Through denial of either the crimes or their personal involvement in the crimes, the perpetrators try to exonerate themselves, despite the fact that at the moment their final words were spoken, their guilt was already determined. They still try to claim the moral high ground and present themselves as honest, loyal soldiers, instead of criminals.

Another option within the framework of denial is the downplaying of the crimes. As stated before, the amount of desaparecidos is debated up to today. Antonio Pernías uses the desaparecidos, by downplaying their number, to make a political statement about the past: *"In relation to the myth of the 30,000 disappeared: It is the most fallacious media tool to characterize the counterrevolutionary war in our country, these arguments were used to acquire repercussion and international interest, but it is a tremendous lie, that by its exaggerated amount and by its repeated enunciation attempts to be the fundamental foundation to reject citizenship and conceal the real knowledge of what happened in our*

¹⁰⁶ Testimony Antonio Vanek, Trial of the Junta April 24, 1985, in: *Diario del Juicio* 22-26 April 1985. And Testimony Jesus Orlando Cappellini, Trial of the Junta April 24, 1985, in: *Diario del Juicio* 22-26 April 1985.

¹⁰⁷ Testimony Juan Carlos Rolón in the Argentinean Senate, October 19, 1994.

¹⁰⁸ Final words of captain Pablo García Velasco in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011. Accessed through Asi se publico.

¹⁰⁹ Final words of captain Alberto González in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011. Accessed through Asi se publico.

country, in addition to deceiving the guiding countries, in order to equate it to a genocide. [...] and to justify the perverse persecution of the military and security forces.”¹¹⁰ Even though there was no consensus on the amount of desaparecidos, when this statement was made in 2011 the debate had already tilted towards the amount of 30,000, instead of the approximately 8,000 accounted for in Nunca Más. Pernías however appropriates this debate on the amount of victims to down play the crimes committed. He tries to restructure the narrative of a war against subversion in contrast to the narrative of the killing of civilians, to legitimise himself again as citizen.

Denying or downplaying crimes are closely connected to a third strategy of framing the past and present: silencing. In the name of reconciliation several perpetrators refrain from speaking about the past, to not ‘rip open old wounds’. Admiral Enrique Molina Pico, who had become the head of the army in 1995, declared during a speech: *“For the men who fulfilled their duty, the time of accountability before the law has ended. But the stage of accountability of the conscience continues”*.¹¹¹ The time to talk about the past and to be judged for it was over. Healing and change were to be achieved individually. Astiz, in the 1998 interview, tried to create a cover for himself (and his former comrades) through the silencing of the past: *“But I do not want to talk. That’s why I do not give interviews or accept photos. Because it’s done. No more need to talk. I have a friend who has a little poem on the desk that says: ‘Before you tell the truth, saddle the horse, you may need it’*”.¹¹² Silencing of the past becomes an active defence strategy in self-representation and legitimisation. If there is no crime to speak about there is no need to defend oneself. Perpetrators avoid speaking of the past: on paper, this denial serves reconciliation; in reality, it serves the goal of self-protection.

To serve the strategy of downplaying or silencing, perpetrators often use metaphors or euphemisms in their confessions and testimonies. Astiz uses a cleaning metaphor to describe his actions in the past: *“6,500 have disappeared, maybe some more, I don’t know exactly how much more. No more than 10 thousand that’s for sure. People who say that there are 30 thousand desaparecidos are crazy, but so are the people who say they live in Mexico. We have cleaned them all out of the way, there was no other option”*. When the interviewer Gabriella Cerruti asks him what he means with ‘cleaned’ he responds: *“They killed them [they meaning the army], what else were they going to do? In 1973 they [subversives] had been imprisoned but released with amnesty. The same risk could not be taken, there was no other*

¹¹⁰ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Pernías in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011.

¹¹¹ Declaration Admiral Enrique Molina Pico, May 4, 1995.

¹¹² Interview Alfredo Astiz by Gabriella Cerrutti, published in *Tres Puntos*, January 16, 1998.

choice”.¹¹³ ‘Cleaned them out of the way’ sounds a lot more positive than killing, propagating a more positive self-image of helping society instead of killing its citizens. Another example is given by captain Pernías, when asked about the torture of prisoners at the ESMA he speaks of ‘reinforced interrogations’ to obtain ‘necessary information’.¹¹⁴ Adolfo Scilingo testifies to the same practices: “... *what are you accusing him [Astiz] of? Of having kidnapped, tortured and killed. You realize that it was the Argentinean Navy, which stopped, interrogated and eliminated*”.¹¹⁵ The Argentinean perpetrators use metaphors and euphemisms to conceal the violent events of the past and put themselves in a better light. It is clear that they still use the linguistic framework of the old regime, reflecting their mind-set on the past events.

Subtle justifications for the violence committed are a part of these testimonies as well. In contrast to the narratives in the first section, where perpetrators proudly present their actions within the narrative of war, these perpetrators use the situation as justification of actions they are not proud of. Through this narrative they try to present themselves in a different light, as having had no other option. During his testimony before the court in 1985 Salvio Menendez frames the conflict and the military’s actions as follows:

“Unfortunately, I must admit that we were facing a war that we did not know, for which we did not have a doctrine finished and we operated in such a manner that our movements were detected well in advance by the enemy, so that we suffered during the anticipated attack. [...] In less than two months I, as commander of that operating unit, was wounded twice, a subordinate of mine died, and there were two or three more injured, that proves, I think quite clearly, the circumstances. We were at the dawn of a war that was not conventional, for which we were not prepared”.¹¹⁶

The war is framed as unconventional, and Menendez framed the army and its soldiers as unprepared for their task. Martín Balza tries to excuse the army by using a similar narrative, meanwhile admitting that things had gone wrong: “*This spiral of violence created an unprecedented crisis in our young country. The armed forces, within them the army for whom I have the responsibility to speak, mistakenly believed that civil society did not have the necessary antibodies to confront the scourge and, with the consent of many, seized power, once again, abandoning the path of constitutional legitimacy. The army trained and trained for the classic war, but did not know how to face terrorism within the law*”.¹¹⁷ The self-

¹¹³ Interview Alfredo Astiz by Gabriella Cerrutti, published in *Tres Puntos*, January 16, 1998.

¹¹⁴ Declaration Antonio Pernías in ESMA trial, “Soy responsable de lo que hice” dijo el imputado Antonio Pernías, August 26, 2010. Accessed through CELS archive.

¹¹⁵ Confesion Adolfo Scilingo published in: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires 1995).

¹¹⁶ Testimony Salvio Menendez, trial of the junta, April 24, 1985., in: *Diario del Juicio* 22-26 April 1985.

¹¹⁷ Declaration of General Martín Balza, April 25, 1995.

representation of an institution by its new leader is interesting, Balza claims a certain naivety among the armed forces and the soldiers, even though the country has a long history of armed uprising against the state. It stands in sharp contrast to the proud militarism expressed by other perpetrators. Intelligence officer Adolfo Donda puts in more bluntly during his testimony in the 2011 ESMA trial. He simply states that: *“A war is not moral”*, excusing all violent events.¹¹⁸

Another legitimising framework that closely related to the frame of blaming the situation, is the blaming of the victims. By delegitimising their narratives, the perpetrators try to position themselves better within the history of the country. Donda tries to legitimise himself through exactly this method: *“I am not a politician, I was a soldier. In a political war there are no innocents and even more so when the current regime allows them [their former enemy: the terrorists] the best conditions. [...] Only knowing the moral appeal of these people who present themselves as victims of something that happened, or not in some cases, but always provoked by their terrorist initiatives. They can do this because of the armour the state place around their versions of the past”*.¹¹⁹ In his account, the people who claim victimhood are not really victims, but perpetrators. Alfredo Astiz goes even further in his effort to delegitimise his enemy. On the ESMA he states: *“It was a place to imprison the enemy, but what they [former prisoners] do not want to tell, the reason why the majority of ESMA survivors do not speak, is because they collaborated”*.¹²⁰ Beyond denying their version of the past, he tries to incriminate them in the violent events. The perpetrators’ self-representation and legitimisation through heroism stands in sharp contrast with the narratives of denial, silence and justification. No pride is taken in the past actions, but excuses are made. The next section will analyse an even more contrasting narrative: the narrative of victimhood.

Victimhood

A strikingly different narrative of self-representation that perpetrators use is the legitimisation of the self as victim. This narrative of legitimisation takes different forms, blaming different groups or institutions for their victimhood. First, there are several perpetrators who claim to be victims of the past, of the conflict or of the specific situation they were in. By placing themselves in a situation that was uncontrollable, or at least out of their control, responsibility is averted. By avoiding responsibility a perpetrator can place himself on the other side of the

¹¹⁸ ‘Excerpts from the extension of Miguel Adolfo Donda’s inquiry’, ESMA trial published by CELS March 31, 2011.

¹¹⁹ Final words of Adolfo Donda in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011. Accessed through *Asi se publico*.

¹²⁰ Interview Alfredo Astiz by Gabriella Cerrutti, published in *Tres Puntos*, January 16, 1998.

binary dividing line between good and evil: the side of the victims. Pernías states the following during his 2011 trial: *“I came to a conclusion: Yes, the armed forces saved the country from the apocalyptic situation reigning in the not so distant past. We were all victims of this cruel war, we suffered, we overcame it and I am convinced that we continue to believe in the idea of this country”*.¹²¹ Pernías presents himself as a victim within a situation of universal suffering, blurring the victim-perpetrator boundary by blaming another entity: “the situation”. The lack of preparation for the situation they entered is also an argument presented. Rolón speaks about the city areas in which they had to perform military missions: *“It was really something unheard of and we were not prepared. We received very little training and then went to participate in these urban operations”*.¹²² By blaming “the situation”, there is no one to whom Tilly’s justice detector of ‘responsibility, agency and competence’ can be applied to. Perpetrators try to avoid blame through this narrative

Suffering on a personal level is however not contained to the period of the violence. At the moment of confessing, the suffering and victimisation by the conflict continues. Carlos Capdevila starts his final plea with mentioning he is medicated for psychological problems ever since the conflict.¹²³ Adolfo Scilingo admits to continue to suffer from the conflict as well, leading to substance abuse and the need for medication. Scilingo explains: *“The two flights I did, I saw persons tortured and I remember the noise of chains. I saw them just a couple of times, but I cannot forget that noise. [...] At a certain moment of stress the memory of the flights automatically returns to my memory. I have had periods in which I have had to take lexotamil, periods in which I have escaped in drinking. The navy thinks the past has not affected me but it has affected me and my family. It totally affected me. The navy does not accept that I have such problems”*.¹²⁴ Not only is Scilingo personally traumatised by (his own actions in) the past, as well as his family, he is also misunderstood by his former comrades and superiors.

Personal traumatisation sometimes leads to a regret and testimonies expressing remorse. Sergeant Victor Ibañez confessed in 1995, in a talk show on television. He had worked in the Campo de Mayo clandestine detention centre. He had not tortured or killed anyone personally, but saw the prisoners and knew what happened to them. When explaining why he confessed at that moment, he says: *“I am motivated only because of my conscience, and I repent, towards God, reason and justice and the entire society. [crying] Excuse me.. I*

¹²¹ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Pernías in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011.

¹²² Testimony Juan Carlos Rolón in the Argentinean Senate, October 19, 1994.

¹²³ Final words of Carlos Capdevila in the ESMA trial, October 13, 2011.

¹²⁴ Confesion Adolfo Scilingo published in: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires 1995).

have solidarity with you in my heart".¹²⁵ He furthermore offers to cooperate with victims' relatives in the search for their bodies. Ibañez confesses because he needs his conscience cleared, he can no longer live with it. Captain Jorge Félix Búsico expresses remorse in his testimony as well, during the trial of the junta in 1985. He explains that many of his comrades could easily shake of their experiences. Búsico himself, who had witnessed atrocities such as torture at the ESMA, could not: "*That's not my case, I feel complicit. [when asked why, since he had claimed not to have participated himself] Because I collaborated with my silence. I did not have the courage to make a complaint*".¹²⁶ Remorse, expressed by perpetrators, and motivation to help, are however rare. Furthermore, it is impossible to assess whether these expressions of remorse and regret are genuine. These narratives do however demonstrate perpetrators' attempt to legitimise themselves as compassionate and changed people, deserving of citizenship, as they share in the trauma of the rest of society.

A second strategy for presenting oneself and legitimising oneself as victim is through claiming to be a victim of the military junta as regime, or of your superiors at the armed forces. Perpetrators express different levels of discontent. Some are outraged at their former superiors and feel betrayed by them because of their actions and orders back then, and because of their silence now. Some emphasise the fact that they were low ranking soldiers and that they had to obey the orders they were given. In 1998 Astiz explains his role in the violent missions as follows: "*It was my day-to-day job. I arrived in the morning, they would give me a task and I would go out and do it. This is the reason this hypocrisy of why we did not deny our orders is terrible. I did not argue, first of all because I am a man with a military spirit, the first thing they taught me was to obey my superiors. [...] I don't know how to explain the situation to the young people anymore. That's why I think Balza is a jerk. How can you say that there are orders that you do not have to obey? There would be no armed forces if this was the case. To use your subordinates to commit the worst crimes.. your subordinates can never disobey orders*".¹²⁷ Astiz refers to the declaration General Balza made as head of the navy in 1995, stating that if orders are immoral, a soldier does not have to follow them.¹²⁸ Rolón and Pernías make similar declaration on the subject of obedience as a soldier. When the Argentinean senate asked them what their options were when confronted with an order that did not seem right to them Rolón responds: "*No. We had no choice. The only option was to*

¹²⁵ Confession Victor Ibañez on television program 'Hadad & Longobardi', 1995.

¹²⁶ Testimony captain Jorge Félix Búsico, trial of the junta, July 17, 1985., in: *Diario del Juicio* October 1985.

¹²⁷ Interview Alfredo Astiz by Gabriella Cerrutti, published in *Tres Puntos*, January 16, 1998.

¹²⁸ Declaration of General Martín Balza, April 25, 1995.

request to be withdrawn at that time".¹²⁹ Pernías explains the situation a little more elaborate: *"Because of the hierarchy I was subjected to at the time, I had no ability to make a political decision on the subject. [on his options] "To withdraw or to request discharge. At that time, I could only ask for withdrawal because my years of service were not sufficient to support a request for retirement"*".¹³⁰ The perpetrators present themselves in a different, more innocent light. Authority is strictly vertical, they had no agency of their own. Their obedience masks their own responsibility, as they had no choice to make their own decision. Anyone stating that they did have that option, such as Balza in declared in 1995, does not understand the military rules of conduct or is, as Astiz put it, "a jerk". Ricardo Cavallo frames himself as the 'victim of orders given' as well. During his final words in the 2011 trial he states: *"The commander of the Task Force is not in this trial. [...] this probably gives a new insight into what it means to obey vertically given orders"*.¹³¹ He is being judged, but the ones actually responsible for the crimes, the ones who had given the orders are not. Adolfo Scilingo puts it most bluntly in his 1995 confession: *"We were a group of useful idiots, and they used us"*.¹³² Similar to Fritz his Wehrmacht soldiers, the perpetrators felt betrayed by their former commanders.

This framework of betrayal, in which the perpetrator presents himself as having been betrayed by his former superiors, or is betrayed by them in the present, is used to diffuse personal agency and claim victimhood. Pernías states that he had not been aware of human rights covenants or rules. *"We never discussed, matters related to covenants or International Conventions on Human Rights. We who fought, we did not know that there were international covenants and conventions for which we are now re-judged, much less imagine that they would be applied retroactively. I must imagine that at that time the government officials who participated in the decisions were also unaware of them... If they existed, they did not apply to the legal principles in force at the time, and are arbitrarily employed today"*.¹³³ As subordinates, they had been kept in the dark about human rights. The fact that they could have decided what was morally right or wrong for themselves is ignored. Pernías furthermore stated that he *"May be guilty of everything the politicians did not know how to solve"*.¹³⁴ Claiming to have been used by the junta for the dirty work.

¹²⁹ Testimony Juan Carlos Rolón in the Argentinean Senate, October 19,1994.

¹³⁰ Testimony Antonio Pernías in the Argentinean Senate, October 19,1994.

¹³¹ Final words of captain Ricardo Cavallo in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011.

¹³² Confesion Adolfo Scilingo published in: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires 1995).

¹³³ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Pernías in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011.

¹³⁴ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Pernías in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011.

Explicit narratives of betrayal are used a lot in perpetrator narratives. A striking example is the testimony by Scilingo. He feels betrayed by his former superiors, accusing them of hiding the truth and keeping their subordinates in the dark about the past.

“The superiors had the attitude to hide everything, they were acting in a strange way. If you obey orders, and enough time has passed for those orders to cease being a secret for operational reasons, they still continued to hide or lie directly. [...] that is to lie in a treacherous form. According to that I say that they have turned us into criminals. Because all of us who were subordinates within the naval organization believed that it were serious and coherent orders. But then the truth is hidden. Why is it hidden? It is hidden when something has been done that does not match up”.¹³⁵

By lying or keeping quiet in the present, the superiors have turned Scilingo in a criminal. Betrayal happened both in the past (by giving false orders or indoctrinating the soldiers) and in the present, by continuing to lie. Remarkably Scilingo frames himself as a victim of the same people who have victimised the entire society, the junta and army leaders. Through the de-contextualisation of the situation and diffusing of his own responsibility Scilingo claims victimhood and sides himself with the rest of society, as one group of people that has suffered equally from the same institution. Through this type of narrative, perpetrators try to enter the hierarchy of victimhood nationalism in society.

As discussed, not only past actions and orders lead to narratives of betrayal. Perpetrators claim victimhood through actions of their former superiors and comrades in the present. The critique on former superiors relates mostly to their silence in the present. The perpetrators feel abandoned by the people on whose orders they acted. Adolfo Donda asks his former comrades and superiors to speak out on the past: *“I chose the task of being a military man and taking orders as a junior officer. The policy of silence of the armed forces has been negative. But there is always time to change. So I ask my comrades to reverse this situation. Detaining [the enemy] for us was a legal, orderly task, given the state of siege and exceptional character of the country at this time”*.¹³⁶ Interestingly, albeit feeling betrayed by former comrades who keep still, Donda still believes in the righteousness of the past actions. Scilingo appears to still believe in the orders and violent actions as well. He claims victimisation through the silence of his former superiors who fail to explain the situation, as their explanation could set him free of responsibility and guilt. *“Once and for all this had to come to light, we had to end the subject by telling the truth. Not for defence or justification,*

¹³⁵ Confesion Adolfo Scilingo published in: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires 1995).

¹³⁶ ‘Excerpts from the extension of Miguel Adolfo Donda's inquiry’, ESMA trial published by CELS March 31, 2011.

*but for the harsh reality that it was. The term 'disappeared' seems unacceptable to me. Because I did not make anyone disappear, nor did anyone in the navy. The enemy was eliminated in a war, it could also have been by firing squad".*¹³⁷ Scilingo was telling his truth, and wanted backup in order to legitimise his narrative and himself.

The violent actions committed or witnessed in the past however often lead to a confrontation with oneself, as many perpetrators claim in their narratives. Adolfo Donda explains: *"It is difficult to explain what the fulfilment of an order at this time means; it is difficult to understand it. At that time, the orders were still sacred; loyalty could not be broken. It was something that could not be conceived because there was nothing above the fulfilment of an order".*¹³⁸ It becomes morally problematic for Donda to explain the orders and tasks almost forty years later, during his trial in 2010. Scilingo faces the same confrontation with his former self, and his former beliefs.

"Today I say that it was an outrage. At that moment we were totally convinced of what we were doing. In the way we were indoctrinated, with the situation in the country. It would be a total lie if I told you that I would not do it again under the same conditions. I would be a hypocrite. When I did everything I did I was convinced that they were subversives. What happens is that I tell you this at this moment, and I tell you in detail because you ask me, and I believe the truth must be known, but do not think that it makes me happy or does me well. At this moment I cannot say that they were subversives. They were human beings." [...] "We were all convinced that it was the best thing that could be done for the country, and it were also military orders. Now look at the result".¹³⁹

The confrontation with the past is hard. Scilingo uses two different strategies to hide his own responsibility. First, he claims that they were all convinced of the righteousness, de-individualising his past actions and participation in atrocities. If others had not been able to judge the situation clearly, how could he have? Second, he claims a clear break with the past. Then he did immoral things, but he is better now, absolving him of further guilt or judgement. In the confrontation with the past, the perpetrator is victim of the past situation, the former regime but also of his own former (indoctrinated or lied to) self.

The claim to victimhood can however take a completely different turn from what is demonstrated and analysed in the previous sections. This third narrative of victimhood reconnects with the narrative of war, heroism, patriotism and pride. Perpetrators claim to be victims of the post conflict society and new government. The complaint of 'illegitimate trials'

¹³⁷ Confesion Adolfo Scilingo published in: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires 1995).

¹³⁸ 'Inquiry of the accused: Donda and Capdevila speak: "It is difficult to explain what the fulfilment of an order means is this era" said Donda', ESMA trial, Published by CELS 12 March, 2010.

¹³⁹ Confesion Adolfo Scilingo published in: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires 1995).

held against them are one the main narratives to promote the idea of victimhood. Astiz states in 2011: *“It has become clear to me, when I hear the false accusations, that they originate in the fact that illegitimate prosecutors do not forgive us that we participated in the fighting that helped to defeat the terrorism that threatened our country”*.¹⁴⁰ The narrative includes a claim for heroism and a delegitimation of the new system and government through the denouncement of the trial. Astiz continues by saying that he has already been prosecuted for the alleged crimes in 1985, but has been freed from all charges. Anyone who would testify for him positively, Astiz claims, is now dead. *“Imprescriptibility is a weapon that can be used by a government, according to its political needs, to violate the Human Rights of those it considers its enemies”*.¹⁴¹ Astiz used the language of human rights violations (of which he is accused) to accuse the current government, claiming to be considered its enemy with which it can do as it pleases. The words ‘judicial terrorism’ are even used. A fair trial would be impossible under these circumstances. Juan Carlos Rolón speaks of *“9 years of captivity [...] simply because I am being subjected to a political trial - Premeditated, meaning implemented through a legal mask for the preconceived political decision, a sentence that from its beginning was already decided”*.¹⁴² The current government is accused of seeking revenge, instead of justice. Perniás speaks of ‘political persecution’: *“We live in a state of civil defencelessness, in a permanent state of exception, corruption is seen in all strata, and powers are abused”*.¹⁴³ Captain Jorge Acosta makes a similar complaint, he is ‘subjected to long-standing political, legal persecution’.¹⁴⁴ Cavallo compares legal process to the armed struggle of the terrorists (and considers the new regime an extension of the terrorists): *“Today, the weapons are not the weapons, but the legal rules used in a discretionary manner”*.¹⁴⁵ Donda makes an even more interesting comparison: *“I have nothing to do with the Nazis, on the contrary, I feel like a persecuted Jew. Why should I be alone in the trial?”* The bill of the “war against terrorism” is to be paid by a few, and the new government is a ‘perpetrator of revenge’.¹⁴⁶ The perpetrators appropriate the language of human rights, which had been globalised. These universal ideas on victimhood provided them with a new language to claim victimhood for themselves.

¹⁴⁰ Final words of captain Alfredo Astiz in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem.

¹⁴² ‘Savio y Rolón: últimas palabras’, published by CELS, October 21, 2011.

¹⁴³ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Perniás in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011.

¹⁴⁴ ‘I have no political project, I am a military man from the military high school’ (Jorge Acosta), report on ESMA trial. Published by CELS March 18, 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Final words of captain Ricardo Cavallo in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Final words of Adolfo Donda in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011.

Several claims are also made on the conditions of imprisonment. Lieutenant Emilio Herrero Anzorena speaks of the conditions he, as an old man, faces in prison, where he is detained for his involvement in the La Cacha detention centre. In 2014 he writes a card to be made public by Union de Promociones. He is ‘sleepy and hungry’, transported to a doctor in an old van with hard seats while handcuffed: *“And this is a small example of the countless torments we endure, almost daily. We, the more than 1800 members of the armed forces and security, imprisoned throughout the country”*.¹⁴⁷ Astiz also makes a complaint on the conditions he is subjected to during the 2011 ESMA trial, directly accusing the present government of these circumstances: *“It did not matter, therefore, that those falsely imputed here had to sleep four hours a day for three days in a row, we were fed improperly, we had to withstand the cold and dampness of the dungeon for several hours a day. As was foreseeable, given the average age of the present imputed, these facts brought medical consequences, some of them of importance. [...] “The persecution, martyrdom and in some cases, as I said, death of the social group, is violating their human rights, and is, consequently, a “crime against humanity”*”.¹⁴⁸ Interesting is again the appropriating of the language of human rights. The words used by the victim organisations and the court are reversed by the perpetrators in their own defence and legitimisation.

Not only the government and the trials are accused as the present victimisers. Perpetrators often feel betrayed by the entire post conflict society and all its people. Scilingo claims that the entire society had supported the army during the junta. If more citizens had been against the methods than ‘things would have been different’.¹⁴⁹ Vilardo accuses the Argentines of indifference of their situation, which is *“perhaps the result of the efficient and ferocious psychological campaign that through the media and journalism penetrated into two generations that did not live the hell of the 70s, but we have remained as a group degraded and ignored”*.¹⁵⁰ Donda states that for over twenty-five years he has been subjected to humiliation, *escraches*, and scandals, meant to blur the historical truth and make a political prisoner of him.¹⁵¹ The perpetrators do clearly feel like they deserve with their place in society.

Connected to these sentiments is the hate perpetrators show for the lack of recognition they receive for their effort against terrorism. Nestor Savio states that the ‘victim of terrorism’

¹⁴⁷ Emilio Herrero Anzorena, ‘I’m cold. I’m sleepy.’ (September 2014). Accessed through Union de Promociones.

¹⁴⁸ Final words of captain Alfredo Astiz in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Confesion Adolfo Scilingo published in: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires 1995).

¹⁵⁰ Eugenio B. Vilardo, ‘God why did you leave me?’ (July 2015).

¹⁵¹ Final words of Adolfo Donda in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011.

is totally destitute and without any kind of right to compensation ‘similar to those received by the relatives of the terrorists’. He himself is not the only victim, he complains that his wife is now living in scarcity, depending on financial help from family and friends.¹⁵² Perniás dedicates his final words to his wife who “*has found the stoicism and the necessary strength in the face of martyrdom on how to cope with the perverse iniquity that we must suffer*”.¹⁵³ The lack of reparations and help makes the perpetrators and their families a group of second class citizens. Donda claims to be a ‘scapegoat’, a concept enforced by the current dominant memory in society. Instead he thinks that: “*We all deserve reparation regardless of who assaulted whom, at this point in history no one should have an interest in harming another*”.¹⁵⁴ Donda proposes to take a step beyond the history or context of the conflict, because the context has been lost, in order to achieve a better society today.

Another dominant element in the perpetrator narratives is the interesting claim by many perpetrators of the lack of complete history in society. Their memories and stories, in which their narratives of self-representation and legitimisation fit, are claimed to be completely absent or marginalised from the public memory. Within this complaint, an accusation is formulated (explicit or implicit) to the new government and society for marginalising their story, and thereby marginalising them as members of society. Lieutenant Anzorena writes the following statement: “*How ironic! I am being tried for having exposed my life day by day against terrorism that hit the nation (Does anyone remember? Or has the memory been lost?). According to the modern neo-guerrillas, disguised as officials, judges and prosecutors, [I am prosecuted] for ‘violating human rights’. What hypocrisy! It seems that human rights for us now do not exist*”.¹⁵⁵ Nestor Savio accuses victims of telling ‘fantastic and false stories without any serious proof’. Instead of (naturally) losing memory over time, they remembered more and more, and they used this memory to indoctrinate the new generations through education and the media. Savio claims these witnesses tell their stories for three reasons: ‘protectionism, fame and money’.¹⁵⁶ Through this narrative Savio tries to delegitimise the stories told by witnesses and victims.

Many perpetrators use the complaint or accusation of missing history to legitimise themselves. If their own narrative is recognised and restored, they are the heroes instead of the perpetrators. Pico states that: “*What we have to do is to recognize the reality, the whole*

¹⁵² Final words captain Nestor Savio in the ESMA trial, October 21, 2011. Accessed through on Asi se publico.

¹⁵³ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Perniás in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011.

¹⁵⁴ Final words of Adolfo Donda in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ Emilio Herrero Anzorena, ‘I’m cold. I’m sleepy.’ (September 2014).

¹⁵⁶ Final words captain Nestor Savio in the ESMA trial, October 21, 2011.

reality, to finish the installed war of lies".¹⁵⁷ Pernías makes a similar statement that the past is manipulated to suit the new government, 'a lie, a scam', that decontextualises the violence of the past.¹⁵⁸ Raul Scheller states that he has been doomed since the trial against him started, "*..not by the weight of the proof or the reason of the right but by the force of a state apparatus that has pledged all its resources to crown a grotesque falsification of history*".¹⁵⁹ This falsification has turned the perpetrators into the scapegoats of society.

Different strategies are used by perpetrators, narratives of self-representation and self-legitimation range from proudly claiming to be the heroes of the nation and protectors of its people, silencing and justifying the past crimes or claiming some sort of victimhood, either relating to shame and guilt or to pride. Interestingly, all perpetrators present a system of vertical hierarchy and obedience, whether positively (you could prove your loyalty and it was needed for the army to function) or negatively (obedience created a lack of agency and moral repression within the armed forces). The next part of this chapter will analyse these perpetrator narratives in relation to the dynamics of politics, narrative and memory in Argentina. How have these narratives changed in relation to the larger dynamics in society and how did the perpetrators change their language to appeal to the concept of citizenship and belonging in the state?

Perpetrators in society

As Halbwachs stated in the early twentieth century, memory is social. The individual places his own memory and narrative of the past within the memory and narrative of a group, society or nation. The group derives its social identity from memory. The first part of this chapter demonstrates that the dominant, public narrative on the past has been shifting ever since the violence ended. In the in the 1980s, the junta and armed forces dominated the narrative. They propagated the narrative of war against subversive elements and terrorists until the very end, as de final document published by the junta and army clearly demonstrates. In the first years of democracy, the truth commission published its *Nunca Más* report on the violence. The large number of witness and victim testimonies included shifted the narrative away from a war against dangerous elements, because too many civilians who had nothing to do with guerrillas or political activism had been targeted. But even though the scale of victims had been identified, the report retained a narrative of two guilty sides, the two demon theory,

¹⁵⁷ Declaration Admiral Enrique Molina Pico, May 4, 1995.

¹⁵⁸ Final words of lieutenant Antonio Pernías in the ESMA trial, October 19, 2011.

¹⁵⁹ Final words of captain Raul Scheller in the ESMA trial, October 30, 2011. Accessed through *Asi se publico*.

within which the military had only been slightly more responsible for the violence than other, leftist groups had been.

The perpetrator testimonies of the 1980s fit in perfectly within this narrative. The perpetrators, most of whom testified during the 1984-1985 trial of the junta (as accused or as witness) propagate the narrative of war against subversion and terrorism. Through this war narrative, the perpetrators represent themselves as heroes of the Argentinean nation. Had not they risked their lives to protect the Argentine people from these violent terrorists? They were the ones who had protected the traditions and Christian foundations of the country against Marxist chaos. The perpetrators take pride in their actions, they get their identity as hero through the concept of the nation state. They belong to the in-group of the citizen community, because of their actions in service of the nation state. The second line of narrative that dominates the perpetrator narratives of this decade is denial. Even in court, they frame the violence similarly (the war narrative remains popular), but either completely deny, or deny personal involvement in or knowledge of excesses, such as torture or even the existence of clandestine detention centres. The impunity measure taken by the Argentinean government, the Full stop and Due obedience laws of 1986 and 1987 and the amnesty given to perpetrators by president Menem in 1990 further seemed to have confirmed the perpetrators narratives of anti-subversive war, heroic militarism and denial of crimes.

In reaction to these developments, human rights and victim organisations fought for their narrative on the past to be the dominant, and they succeeded. Truth trials, protests and *escraches* spread the narrative of state perpetrated violence, violence which was not punished up to that day. Victims of state violence were offered reparations to ‘compensate’ their losses and help get their lives together, amongst which money, healthcare, free education and housing.¹⁶⁰ Monuments to remember and honour the victims of state terror were being initiated. Memorialisation and memory make up a crucial part within transitional justice and promoting the debate on the past. The first discussions of making a memorial park for the victims of state terrorism in Buenos Aires began in 1998.¹⁶¹ This creation, or rehabilitation, of *lieux de memoire*, or sites of remembrance, further stabilised the dominant narrative in society and crystallised the concept of victimhood. The experience of others, the non-victims who have no agency to interpret the past differently, have no place in public remembrance, nor in the monuments. Their memory is absent in the public. The narrative of state terror dominated

¹⁶⁰ For more information on victim reparation policies in Argentina see Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (London 2010) and NIOD internship report Francesca Hooft.

¹⁶¹ Website Parque de la Memoria. Accessed via <http://parquedelamemoria.org.ar> on April 29, 2017.

the national discourse, delegitimising the perpetrator narrative of heroism. The perpetrators however remained unpunished.

During this period, the first cracks begin to show in the armed forces' perfect narrative of anti-subversive war and heroism. In 1994 and 1995, Adolfo Scilingo and Victor Ibañez are the first ones to speak publicly about systematic 'excesses' such as throwing alive but sedated people out of airplanes towards their death. They end the military's silence on the past publicly, on national television and in a nationwide-read book. Interestingly, they state to confess out of remorse for specific actions, with which they personally can no longer live and because of the stigmatisation they face every day as a former member of the military. Many still deem the acts to have been necessary or justified within the framework of anti-subversive war, but there is also doubt on the righteousness of the actions. Remarkable is that the perpetrators criticise their superiors (explicitly or implicitly) for keeping silent on the past and not telling 'the truth'. They request their former superiors to back their stories up, because without that backup, that affirmation of their narrative, their story of justification and legitimisation falls apart.

After the election of Kirchner as president in 2003 the narrative of state terror, crimes against humanity and even genocide became acknowledged by the, then ruling, political elite, leading to the revocation of the amnesty and impunity laws, and the reopening of trials in 2006. The strategy of 'victimhood nationalism' paid off. The primary community in society, which was served by the state, consisted of the victims and survivors. To belong to society, to be a good citizen, was to be 'on their side of history'. Perpetrators were completely marginalised, and from 2006 on prosecuted for their involvement in the state terror of 1976-1983.

It is clear that within this new memory regime of human rights violations by the state, the perpetrators position and narrative of justified warfare became unsustainable. They needed a new strategy of representing and legitimising oneself within the new societal hierarchy. A new strategy to belong to the community of citizens. The most recent perpetrator narratives of self legitimisation and representation claim victimhood from either the conflict itself, the former regime or the present regime. When claiming victimhood from either the conflict or the authoritarian state and military, perpetrators try to diffuse their own responsibility and shift blame to others. More precisely, they shift the blame to the same people or institutes that the dominant victim group blames for the violence and the missing people. Through these types of narrative, perpetrators de-politicise and de-contextualise themselves and try to enter

the group of victims, climb in the hierarchy by appropriating the strategy of victimhood nationalism and thereby reclaim their citizenship in the Argentinean state.

Claiming victimhood of the present government and society however serves a whole other purpose. In these narratives, the perpetrators are the scapegoats, the true martyrs of society. They continue the narrative of anti-subversive war, with themselves as central hero. They remain within the language of the former regime and system. They blame society for not understanding their situation and not providing space for full memory in society. They blame the new government for a lack of recognition and reparations for them and their families, for acts of revenge against them (such as the trials) and the ‘inhumane’ treatment they receive while in prison. Their claim for victimhood is a reinvention of the war and heroism narrative used for self-legitimation. Their victimhood is over-contextualised (only focuses on anti-subversive warfare), which shapes their demand to be included in the post violent society, that they deserve to be a full member including all rights, that they are citizens.

How victims and perpetrators have organised themselves in groups is an interesting point of attention. The most prominent and influential victim organisations in Argentina are the Abuelas and Madres de Plaza de Mayo (both established in 1977) and H.I.J.O.S. (established in 1995). They all ask for “Memory, Truth and Justice” for the past.¹⁶² The organisations originated in a common struggle for missing narrative and absent memory in society and justice for the desaparecidos and their stolen children.¹⁶³ They demand the truth about their missing relatives and justice for the human rights violations that took place. As explained above, H.I.J.O.S. held *escraches*, the Madres and Abuelos protest in Buenos Aires’ Plaza de Mayo, in front of the president’s house. They protest, online, through the judicial system and the streets. Global human rights and universal ideas of victimhood are reflected in their language. The victim organisations strategized these concepts in their narratives on the past, emphasising their status as victim to be recognised everywhere around the world.

Contrasting to these large amount of victim and human rights organisations, (former) military men and their families only began to organise themselves in their own organisations in the early 2000s. These organisations are shaped similarly to the victim organisations, they have their own aid programs for their members and organise protests and memorials to raise awareness for their situation. They appropriated the same language of “Memory, Truth and Justice” and human rights violations. The organisations demand recognition for their struggle

¹⁶² Website Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio, ‘Comisión Escrache’. <http://www.hijos-capital.org.ar/> Accessed on May 2, 2017.

¹⁶³ Website Abuelos de Plaza de Mayo, ‘Historia’. <https://www.abuelas.org.ar/> Accessed on May 2, 2017.

during the ‘anti-subversive war’ and in the present, and for recognition for their side of the story, their memory and narrative. Through these demands, the organisations claim victimhood of either the conflict or victimhood of the present society and government. While there are many large and small ‘victim’ (perpetrator) organisations in Argentina, four prominent organisations will be discussed in this section: the Centre for Legal Studies on Terrorism and its Victims, Union de Promociones, Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de los Presos Políticos de Argentina and Asociación Civil de Abogados por la Justicia y la Concordia. This part will showcase their strategy, the narrative of legitimisation they propagate and demonstrate how they appeal, as a group, to other (victim) groups in society. Two strategies can be retrieved: one follows the strategy of the other victim groups, demanding truth, memory and justice. Several organisations even hold a public remembrance service on October 5 each year, to commemorate the ‘victims of terrorism’. The other strategy follows the line of the last perpetrator group: they claim victimhood of the new regime continuing the narrative of heroism in a just war.

The Centre for Legal Studies on Terrorism and its Victims (CELTYV) was created in 2006 as a: “non-governmental organization dedicated to the assistance of victims of terrorism in Argentina. Our work is carried out both in the national and international context, with the aim of making the victims visible, working for the recognition of their rights and contributing our effort in pursuit of historical truth”. They state that after thirty years, they still fight to ‘obtain their rights as well as support from the state and society’.¹⁶⁴ Many goals are similar: historical truth and recognition of victims’ rights. Only in their context, victims are the soldiers, and their families, who suffered from or were killed by attacks carried out by anti-subversives and terrorists right before and during the junta. The concept of terrorism is as easily (ab)used by organisations as it is by the individual perpetrators to legitimise their narrative and their actions. Another organisation, the Union de Promociones is shaped similarly. Their aims are to assist all detained and prosecuted comrades of the armed, security and police forces and their families with legal matters and to fight for a complete historical truth with true memorialisation of the dead.¹⁶⁵ These organisations aims are helping restore memory and truth and to provide justice for victims, similarly to the ‘traditional’ victim organisations. They appeal to other groups in society by copying their strategy and

¹⁶⁴ Website Centre for Legal Studies on Terrorism and its Victims (CELTYV), ‘What is the CELTYV?’. <http://www.victimasdeargentina.com/> Accessed on April 22, 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Website Union de Promociones, ‘Objectives’ and ‘Purpose’. <http://uniondepromociones.info/> Accessed on April 21, 2017.

appropriating their language. Through this narrative, they reclaim membership of, and citizenship in, the ‘victimhood nationalist’ society.

Other organisations follow the second strategy of justification through the war narrative. The Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de los Presos Políticos de Argentina provides a similar description of their mission. They claim that the soldiers currently in prison are unjustly detained, because all their violent operations took place ‘within the framework of a non-international armed conflict’. The current situation is unfair, historical truth is denied to the military, the government ‘seems to have forgotten’ about the terrorist organisation of the 1970s. Other efforts they make to legitimise their narrative is by delegitimising their victims, saying that the witness in trial lie because they get paid, or because they want to save themselves from prosecution.¹⁶⁶ The Asociación Civil de Abogados por la Justicia y la Concordia continues the narrative of war and the legitimacy of the actions as well. The military men imprisoned are political prisoners in the governments project of revenge. They start everyday by posting the exact same message on their Facebook page: ‘Another day starts without justice and harmony. Two thousand political prisoners’.¹⁶⁷ These organisations try to claim a certain degree of victimhood, by applying human rights violations to their own situation. However, instead of appealing to the other victim groups, these organisations try to claim full citizenship through the narrative of war and heroism.

This chapter has demonstrated how the dominant narrative in Argentina changed over the years, how the perpetrators represented and legitimised themselves at the different stages and different moments throughout time. Through narratives of war, heroism, silence, denial, justification or victimhood the perpetrators have (individually or collectively) either appealed to or rejected other groups’ narratives, to reclaim a position for themselves in society and citizenship. One group remains stuck in the language and ideas of belonging to the community of the old regime, claiming citizenship as protector and hero of the community. The other group appropriates the language of the new regime. They claim citizenship by ‘infiltrating’ Argentina’s collective identity of victimhood. With the most recent shift from Kirchner to Macri, and the space the old narratives and language might gain in public narrative and memory, the perpetrators narratives of self-representation and legitimisation might shift further towards these ideas of community membership and citizenship.

¹⁶⁶ Website Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de los Presos Políticos de Argentina (AFyAPPA), ‘About us’ and ‘A former soldier said there were fraudulent compensations’ Blog 8-10-2011. <http://afyappa.blogspot.nl/> Accessed April 22, 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Website Asociación Civil de Abogados por la Justicia y la Concordia <http://www.justiciayconcordia.org/> and <https://www.facebook.com/JusticiayConcordia/> Accessed on April 20, 2017.

Rwanda

This third chapter provides, first of all, an overview of Rwanda's violent history of the 1990s, focussing on the genocide between 7 of April and July 1994, and an analysis of the dominant narrative in Rwanda on this period, including the way this period is remembered and officially memorialised. Second, this chapter analyses perpetrator narratives of self-representation and self-legitimation. Central is the way they remember the period of violence, how they portray their own role in it, and how they represent themselves as part of the Rwandan community then and now. The third part of this chapter will connect the dominant narrative and official remembrance in Rwandan society to the perpetrator narratives. How does the way perpetrators represent themselves relate to the official narrative and public memory? Which language do the perpetrators use to position themselves in society, appeal to other groups in society, and reclaim their citizenship in the new Rwandan state?

Memory and narrative

Rwanda has a turbulent history, with recurrent episodes of violence. The area was colonised in the nineteenth century by the Germans as part of German east-Africa. After World War I it was ruled by Belgium. Rwanda is inhabited by three different ethnic groups, Hutu (large majority), Tutsi (minority) and Twa (approximately only 1% of Rwandans). These ethnicities gained specific meanings during the colonial era. The colonial rulers preferred to cooperate with Tutsis (system of indirect rule) and installed identity cards for all citizens, stating to which ethnicity he or she belonged. 'Ethnicity', before colonial rule, had been more fluent. One could climb the social ladder from Hutu to Tutsi and vice versa, making these 'ethnicities' more class or socially determined. The colonial period crystallised them.¹⁶⁸ This background, ethnic differences in which Tutsis could rule and Hutus had to serve, form the background for the violence during the first independent Rwandan republics and the 1994 genocide.

In 1959 a social revolution, or 'Hutu revolution' took place. The colonial rulers 'switched sides' and cooperated with Hutus towards the realisation of independence, which was reached in 1962. Many Tutsi feared reprisals from Hutus, as the Tutsis were considered alien, feudal rulers who had cooperated with the colonial lords, and many fled the country.¹⁶⁹ The first two Rwandan republics, led between 1962 and 1973 by president Kayibanda, and

¹⁶⁸ Straus, *Making and Unmaking Nations. War, Leadership and Genocide in Modern Africa*, 275-281.

¹⁶⁹ Most Tutsi fled to the neighbouring states of Uganda, Zaire (Congo) and Burundi.

between 1973 and 1994 by president Habyarimana (both Hutu), discriminated against Tutsis, and episodes of violence against them occurred. The new state was based on majority, Hutu, rule, and the Tutsi presence was considered a continuous threat to the new social and political reality realised in the revolution. Meanwhile, the Tutsis in exile regrouped. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was created in the late 1980s by Fred Rwigema and Paul Kagame. The movement envisioned the return of Tutsi exiles to Rwanda, and included a strong (and ever growing) army: the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA). The RPA attacked Rwanda from the Ugandan border region in 1990, under command of Kagame, starting a civil war that would end in the 1994 genocide.

The armed threat of the Tutsi RPF, combined with the Rwandan foundation narrative that the Tutsi were alien to Rwanda -feudal lords who would 're-enslave' the Hutu population - led to armed clashes between the RPA and the Rwandan (Hutu) army. While the specifics of the civil war cannot be discussed at length here, the RPA formed a serious threat to the state. The 1993 Arusha peace accords did not put an end to the violence between the armed groups, nor did it stop the violence against the Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda. The violence was stimulated by the 'Hutu power' bloc: the political elite who wanted an ethnically homogenous Hutu state with a Hutu regime in power at all cost.¹⁷⁰

On 6 April 1994 the Rwandan president Habyarimana was assassinated when his plane was shot down.¹⁷¹ This was the onset of the genocide on the Tutsi population. Between the 7th of April and July 1994, an estimated amount between 500,000 and 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed by the Rwandan Army, the Interahamwe militias and civilians who were persuaded or forced to join in the killings. An estimated amount of 80% of the Hutu population has participated in the violence against, mostly, their own neighbours.¹⁷²

The genocide ended when the RPF controlled most of Rwanda's territory, including the capital Kigali, in July 1994. The RPF's invasion had not been peaceful, many Hutus had been killed and during the first period of Paul Kagame's reign (de facto a heavily Tutsi authoritarian regime) these purges continued. Unlike in Argentina, or many other countries, no truth commission was installed. The internal justice system could not handle the amount of accused Hutus. Thousands were arrested and imprisoned but, for years and years, never officially accused or brought before a court. In 1995, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was opened, with a mandate to prosecute all violence between January 1 and

¹⁷⁰ Straus, *Making and Unmaking Nations. War, Leadership and Genocide in Modern Africa*, 298-304.

¹⁷¹ It is still unknown who shot the plane down, both the RPF as well as the Hutu power bloc had the means and motive to assassinate the president.

¹⁷² Mamdani, *When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*, 265-266.

December 31 1994 in Rwanda (no matter who committed it).¹⁷³ Furthermore, in 2001 the Gacaca courts were opened. This form of traditional justice (local community served as judge) was meant to speed up the process of prosecuting all imprisoned perpetrators.¹⁷⁴ To shift justice from national to the Gacaca level, approximately 50,000 ‘low-level’ perpetrators, people convicted for looting or participating in violence - not the organisers or leaders, have been released from prison between 2003 and 2007. Provided that they would confess their crimes, they were able to return home and be judged by Gacaca courts.¹⁷⁵ All people indicted, prosecuted and imprisoned within Rwanda are Hutus, no Tutsi has been convicted of violence in Rwanda. Even the ICTR who has a mandate to also convict RPF members, struggles to do so because of a lack of cooperation, or downright obstruction by the Rwandan government.¹⁷⁶

These justice mechanisms reflect the dominant narrative in Rwanda as imposed by the new government. A Tutsi victors’ justice was established, not a survivors’ justice. The Tutsi government, representing a small minority in Rwanda, needed a strategy to legitimise its rule post 1994. The narrative and memorialisation to ‘create reconciliation and unity’ included three main strategies: shifting blame to a non-existent entity; eliminating ethnic differences in Rwanda; and – interestingly contrasting – crystallising the Tutsi as the only victim group. Important to notice is that this narrative does not only concern the period of genocide, but includes a rewritten version of decades before as well.

The Rwandan government and the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) promote a version of history that contradicts the foundational narrative that underpinned the genocide in the first place. It denied the story that the Tutsis were invaders and the Hutus were native to Rwanda. These ethnic differences were imposed by the colonial rulers and Catholic Church during colonial rule, they had introduced the identity cards which mentioned ethnicity and privileged the Tutsi. Before that, the Rwandans had known no ethnic differences and lived together in peace and harmony.¹⁷⁷ The division and inequality between the ethnicities that was created during colonial rule was to blame for the tension and social revolution of 1959, the ethnic violence during the first two republic and eventually: for the

¹⁷³ André Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990-1994* (Madison 2015) 308.

¹⁷⁴ Susanne Buckley-Zistel, ‘Remembering to forget: Chosen amnesia as a strategy for local coexistence in post-genocide Rwanda’, in: *The Journal of the International African Institute* 76:2 (2006) 144.

¹⁷⁵ Suzanne Hoeksema, ‘Ingando: Re-educating the Perpetrators in the Aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide’, in: Uğur Ümit Üngör ed., *Genocide: New Perspectives on its Causes, Courses and Consequences* (Amsterdam 2016) 202.

¹⁷⁶ Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990-1994*, 315-316, 344-345.

¹⁷⁷ Timothy Longman and Théoneste Rutagengwa, ‘Memory, identity and community in Rwanda’, in: Eric Stoven and Harvey Weinstein eds., *My Neighbour, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the aftermath of Mass Atrocity* (Cambridge 2004) 164-166.

civil war and the genocide. This narrative serves the purpose of creating a sense of unity in Rwanda, by eliminating the ethnic differences. Furthermore it shifts the blame for the violence to an entity that no longer exists: the colonial and previous Rwandan governments. The RPF was the entity to end the violence and restore peace, through ending the ethnic tensions that – as they claimed – were imaginary.

This narrative of national unity and de-ethnicisation was propagated through a specific Rwandan educational creation: the *Ingando* camp. Every Rwandan had to attend an Ingando camp to be educated on the new principles of the nation and the “unity and harmony of its people” living together in the new system. Controlled top-down, the government and the NURC could indoctrinate its citizens with this new idea of a national (instead of local or ethnic) community in which they had to function and which they had to serve. A new idea of ‘Rwandanness’, created through invented history and tradition, served the goal of uniting Rwanda’s citizens.¹⁷⁸ In theory, by accepting the new narrative and new idea of Rwandan citizenship, Hutus could shake off the collective guilt that belonged to their ethnic group. The responsibility was shifted to the previous regime and the previous idea of Hutu (or Tutsi) citizenship. All they had to do was accept the new narrative, and thereby accept the de facto Tutsi authoritarian rule.

Education in Rwanda on its history and the ‘illusion of ethnic differences’ serves a similar purpose. History education in schools is however on a lockdown, there is no history curriculum for Rwandan schools.¹⁷⁹ The nationalisation or ‘Tutsification’ of history is considered by many Hutus as ‘shaped by ideological considerations’.¹⁸⁰ The lack of consensus on what to teach, as not to endanger the new idea of national unity and support the Tutsi view of the past, demonstrates that the top-down imposed narrative on the past is not just accepted by everyone.

In sharp contrast to this promoted peace, harmony, unity, and especially the elimination of ethnic differences the Rwandan government propagates, is its policy of memorialisation. The Rwandan population is loosely defined into five categories: returnees (former Tutsi exiles); refugees (Tutsi pre-genocide refugees and Hutu post-genocide refugees); victims (Tutsi genocide victims and murdered Hutu moderates); survivors (the Tutsis who had been in country during genocide) and perpetrators (Hutus). Of all these

¹⁷⁸ Hoeksema, ‘Ingando: Re-educating the Perpetrators in the Aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide’, 200-201.

¹⁷⁹ Susanne Buckley-Zistel, ‘Nation, narration, unification? The politics of history teaching after the Rwandan genocide’, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 11:1 (2009) 41-43.

¹⁸⁰ Olivier Nyirubugara, *Complexities and Dangers of Remembering and Forgetting in Rwanda* (Leiden, 2013) 39-40.

categories, the Tutsis were eligible for support and reparations.¹⁸¹ The government promotes national unity and denounces ethnic differences, officially remembering all Rwandan victims of the violence. Unofficially, however, the government shows prejudice against Hutus and favours memorialising the Tutsi deaths, as the genocide is still formally called ‘The genocide against the Tutsi’.¹⁸² The policy of nationalisation or Tutsification of Rwanda denies one substantial part of its population its memory. The official memorialisation and ingando camps illustrate this point, there is no place for Hutus in the de-ethnicised society unless they adapt to the national, Tutsi, narrative and memory. The ethnic identity the government claims to have no importance suddenly does become important when it suits them. De-contextualisation and de-ethnicisation of the conflict is meant to restore unity, create reconciliation and legitimise their own (minority) rule in Rwanda. Denying ethnicity and shifting blame to the previous governments could however create an opportunity for Hutus to claim victimhood as well, as all Rwandans could be considered victims of colonialism and the previous regimes. To shut that door, and secure their own impunity and dominance over the country’s narrative, the government plays its Tutsi ‘victim card’ when it comes to justice and memory.

As explained, the dominant narrative is produced by the government and is its foundation for power. Dissenting views are therefore a direct threat to the regime’s powerbase. Similar to Argentina, society was stuck with a cultural trauma, leaving a permanent mark on Rwanda’s identity. However, the trauma was different for Hutus and Tutsis. The Tutsis were allowed their memory, legitimising their stories and making them the victim group. The Hutus, which consisted of many perpetrators but of whom many had suffered and lost family as well, were denied their memory. Rwanda’s cultural trauma, for them, meant parting with their Hutu identity. Critical junctures, that created a shift in the dominant narrative and public memory in Argentina, are absent in Rwanda. Organisations such as national and international NGO’s or the ICTR, political opposition parties and civil society are, up to this day, shut down by Kagame’s regime.

The government’s strategy to tackle NGO’s was to delegitimise their story by accusing them of being on the wrong side of history, the side of the *genocidaires*. In 2000, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch both released reports critical of the Rwandan government. The government responded by saying that the reports were lies, lacked objectivity or were unsubstantiated. Furthermore, it played the ‘genocide card’, stating that the report was an ‘an insupportable insult to the memory of the more than a million victims of

¹⁸¹ Mamdani, *When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*, 266-267.

¹⁸² Kigali Genocide Memorial. Accessed through <http://www.kgm.rw/> on 14 June 2017.

the 1994 genocide'.¹⁸³ All political opposition was hindered, their leaders arrested or exiled, other political parties that existed were not real opposition parties, but merely supplemented the RPF. In the late 1990s several leaders of human rights associations, such as Cladho, Liprodhor and the Rwandan Association for Human Rights and Public Freedoms were arrested, exiled or died, leading to the end of these organisations. The national and international media suffered a similar fate, press freedom was reduced more and more in the early 2000s.¹⁸⁴ Besides silencing the public the government used the law to strengthen its position and secure its own impunity. By blocking the ICTR it made sure that prosecution of RPF members was minimal, and it did not prosecute its own people within Rwanda. During the 2000s the RPF government began to act more paranoid. After having eliminated political opposition and silenced civil society and NGO's, it started to purge people from within its own ranks. People who for example suggested that other victims might be included in the narrative were arrested for treason and conspiracy against the government, or even terrorism.¹⁸⁵

Selective justice and memorialisation continue in Rwanda. The government's policies create a strong memory regime, including who is a victim and who is not. Their memories are legitimised, and they are memorialised in public. Experiences, memories and narratives of the other group are removed from the public sphere. The dominant narrative as propagated by the government, the narrative that deletes ethnic differences and shifts blame to the previous regimes and colonialism however leaves space for an extension of victimhood to other groups. The next part of this chapter will research the way members of the perpetrator group present themselves and how they appeal to the narrative and new ideas of Rwandan citizenship.

Framing the past, presenting the self

The second part of this chapter analyses testimonies by forty-three perpetrators, both former members of the military and Interahamwe as well as civilians who picked up arms during the genocide of 1994. Central to this part are the way the Rwandan perpetrators frame the past violence, how they present their own role within the violence, and how they represent and

¹⁸³ Filip Reyntjens, 'Constructing the Truth, Dealing with Dissent, Domesticating the World: Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda', in: *African Affairs* 110:438 (2011) 1-34.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 9, 14-15.

¹⁸⁵ Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990-1994*, 344-346.

legitimise themselves and their actions in the past and present.¹⁸⁶ The testimonies collected originate from different sources: interviews with both scholars as well as legal representatives are included, collected either in Rwanda (with perpetrators in freedom and in prison), in refugee camps in Zaire and Cameroon or before the ICTR court, all conducted between 1996 and 2005.

Heroism, morality and pride

The frame of heroism or patriotism has been discussed extensively in chapter one and analysed in chapter two concerning Argentinean perpetrators. Representing oneself as a hero, or true (national) patriot requires a cause everyone agrees with, including an enemy all can agree on as killing civilians is not considered heroic. The narratives of pride, heroism and war construct a history of violence against a true and serious opponent, who posed a threat to the state and its people. Perpetrators use these narratives to construct an enemy and present oneself as the saviour. Interestingly in the Rwandan case, the definition of who the enemy is in warfare depends on which regime you support. This part will demonstrate that perpetrators represent oneself as patriotic heroes both according to the old (Hutu) and according to the new (Tutsi) regimes.

When interviewed in Rilama prison, former Nyamata Interahamwe president Joseph-Desiré Bitero shortly explains the conflict and justifies the violence: *“In town, we had got ready to begin new massacres to counter the Inkotanyi attacks”*.¹⁸⁷ The *Inkotanyi*, meaning ‘the invincible warriors’ is a popular expression referring to the RPF (and therefore Tutsi or ‘accomplice’ Hutu) soldiers. The presentation of the dangerous threat the RPF posed is used as legitimisation of the violence against all Tutsis. Other perpetrators follow a similar line of explanation. Former policeman and forest guard P18 states: *“The Tutsis attacked Rwanda from Uganda, and they killed Hutus. [...] When the Hutus saw that their people were finished, they attacked their Tutsi neighbours”*.¹⁸⁸ Farmer P1: *“In this period, everyone was angry because the president had been killed and everyone said that one had to protect oneself. [...] Our minds changed because of the events in the country”*. When the interviewer asks whether

¹⁸⁶ The testimonies quoted in this thesis are exemplary, due to limited space I am not able to use all the confessions and striking quotes I have found in the sources. Appendix II provides an overview of the collected sources and the type of representations and legitimisations found in these sources.

¹⁸⁷ Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 178.

¹⁸⁸ Scott Straus and Robert Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide* (New York 2006) 81-82. The perpetrators interviewed in *Intimate Enemy* are anonymous. I have numbered them P (perpetrator) 1-23 according to the order in which they are incorporated in the book.

P1 thought he was working on behalf of the nation he responds: *“If the president was killed now, do you think that people would stand with their arms crossed, doing nothing?”*¹⁸⁹

Defending the country against the external (RPF) and later internal (all Tutsis and accomplice Hutus) became one’s duty. Farmer and carpenter P16 explains: *“I went as someone who defends his country that was attacked. I thought that if the enemy came, he would kill me. I went as someone who loves his country. [...] He [the conseiller] came over. He called. He said we had to defend ourselves and be vigilant. [...] I chose to go into military training when they recruited at the commune. [...] During the days they [Tutsis] were hunted; at night, there were patrols. There was no peace in the countryside. You could not sleep peacefully.. The county had been attacked, and we had to fight the enemy. When the enemy was finished, there would be peace”*.¹⁹⁰ Durable peace was to be achieved through the elimination of the enemy, durable peace for the Hutus, that is. Former military commander Théoneste Bagosora, convicted for his role in the organisation of and participation in the genocide, explains the violence against Tutsis in similar terms, the RPF provoked the violence and is to blame: *“The RPF attacks deeply shocked the population. Especially when the RPF ordered its troops to target unarmed civilians, in particular Hutus who did not want to collaborate with them. [...] In February 1993, already 150,000 innocent civilian Hutus had been disgracefully massacred by the RPF hordes, and one million had been displaced”*.¹⁹¹ Years later, still imprisoned, he continues to warn for the Tutsi danger (this time the example of Burundi) to enforce his story of Hutu violence in response to Tutsi violence. In 2002 he states before the ICTR: *“The Burundian army comprises of Tutsis, also representing not more than 10% of the population. They have just killed... President Ndadaye. They not only killed him, but they also mutilated his body! Take it from me that those people are bloodthirsty fellows who never speak the truth!”*¹⁹² Bitero, also still imprisoned and waiting for his death sentence, has not changed his mind either when interviewed years later:

“It’s the Patriotic Front, after all, that massacred a great many Hutus in the camps in Congo. A great many babies and old mamas died for nothing in Kivu. [...] They’re a good thing, the revisionists’ books. My colleagues and I discuss them a lot, because it’s our whole truth that’s coming out of those pages. [...] They clearly explain that the Hutu camp premeditated the genocide of the Tutsis only to defend ourselves against the attacks of the Inkotanyi. [...] We believed

¹⁸⁹ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 40.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem, 75-76. The conseiller was one of the cellule (governing unit, smaller than county) leaders.

¹⁹¹ ‘From prison in Yaounde, Bagosora explains himself’, Interview Théoneste Bagosora published in *Africa International* No. 296, July-August 1996.

¹⁹² Interview Théoneste Bagosora, 28 October 2002, ICTR. Transcript of Col. Bagosora Commentary in Video Kv00-0081 at Minutes 00:01 - 07:32 [K024 7131-33 English]

that the Inkotanyi, once installed on the throne, would be especially oppressive – that the Hutus would be pushed back into their fields and robbed of their words. [...] I was raised in fear of the return of Tutsi privileges, of obeisance and unpaid forced labour, and then that fear began its bloodthirsty march”.¹⁹³

The blame for the genocide is put on the RPF and the conflict itself. Interestingly, Bitero refers to the historical foundational narrative of the Hutu state. By referring to the past in which the Tutsis oppressed the Hutus, he attempts to make his resort to violence against Tutsis more legitimate. Farmer P15, whose wife was a Tutsi, witnessed this appropriation of the foundational narrative to promote violence: “*I learned that Habyarimana was shot at 8 am. That morning everyone you saw said, “We have been saying... for a long time that the Tutsis will exterminate us and, voila, they just killed Habyarimana, who was protected. You, the simple peasants, you are finished”.*”¹⁹⁴ The Tutsis as ‘historically proven’ dangerous elements were to be eliminated in order to protect the people of the country, the Hutus. None of the Tutsis could be trusted. To protect their own ethnic group, the other ethnic group had to be defeated. Army-reservist from Kigali P3 expressed this distrust: “*These were signs that made me no longer trust the Tutsis. [...] All Tutsis. I thought everyone was the same way..*” [...] “*I thought that we would hunt down the Tutsis and then the Hutus would remain, alone*”.¹⁹⁵ When the interviewer asks if he by all Tutsis also means killing women he children P3 responds that they were ‘the intelligence’: “*And if the children were not killed, would the ethnic group be exterminated?..*”¹⁹⁶ All enemies had to be eliminated, including the children, for they would pose a problem in the future.

Besides these narratives of war, danger and protection, some perpetrators speak of their change in personal moral during the genocide and the common identity they found in the perpetration of violence. Ignace Rukiramacumu explains the situation after the assassination of Habyarimana:

“We no longer asked who had trained with guns and gained useful knowhow in a militia, or whose hands had never left a hoe. We had work to do, and we were doing our best. We didn’t care one way or the other who preferred to take his orders from the burgomaster, the Interahamwe, or our well known municipal judge. We obeyed on all sides, and we found satisfaction in that. Suddenly Hutus of every kind were patriotic brothers without any partisan discord. [...] We were doing a job to order. We were lining up behind everyone’s enthusiasm. We

¹⁹³ Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Jean Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide* (London 2007) 95.

¹⁹⁴ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 75.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 42-43.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

gathered into teams on the soccer field and went out hunting as kindred spirits”.¹⁹⁷

As Kühne and Browning discovered, group identity is intensified through the perpetration of violence. Rukiramacumu testifies to this phenomenon. He also took pride in his actions and skill. His identity was shaped by the violence committed. He states: “*Me, because I was older, I was excused from trudging around the marshes. My duty was to patrol in stealth through the surrounding field. I chose the ancestral method, with bow and arrows, to skewer a few Tutsis passing through. As an old-timer, I had known such watchful hunting since my childhood*”.¹⁹⁸ Farmer Léopold Twagirayezu narrates the same pride in his skill: “*Me, I took up only the machete; first because I had one at the house, second because I knew how to use it. If you are skilled with a tool, it is handy to use it for everything – clearing brush or killing in the swamps. Time allowed me to improve in this fashion*”.¹⁹⁹ Being skilled with a machete when clearing brush could be showcased when killing in the swamps. Léopold could establish himself as a leader through his skill. Their mate Adalbert Munzigura explains a similar feeling: “*We worked fast and skimmed along because we were eager. In the middle of the killings, we killed casually. Time and triumph encouraged us to loaf around. At first we could feel more patriotic or more deserving when we managed to catch some fugitives*”.²⁰⁰ Participating in the genocide would improve the position Munzigura would have in the new state, and it strengthened his sense of belonging to this new state at the same time. To have others that are complicit similar to yourself is important within this structure. Fisherman P22 present himself as a leader in this aspect: “*As for those who refused to kill, we thought we would punish them afterward because they had not helped us to combat the enemy*”.²⁰¹ Everyone ought to participate in the destruction of the enemy, and thereby establish a new identity group of perpetrators of violence.

The above narratives are close to the Hutu regime’s narrative of dangerous Tutsis who did not belong in Rwanda and posed a threat to the Hutus living there. These perpetrators represent and legitimise themselves as patriots who protected the country, and present the Tutsis as a group that posed a serious threat. They use the language of the old regime. Another group of perpetrators used a different narrative to represent oneself as hero. Using the language of the new regime, they attempt to legitimise themselves within the country’s new

¹⁹⁷ Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 15-16.

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem, 39.

¹⁹⁹ Interview Léopold Twagirayezu in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 38-39.

²⁰⁰ Interview Adalbert Munzigura in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 51.

²⁰¹ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 93.

situation. Through the language of the new regime, heroism or patriotism is claimed through stories of rescue and protection of the people the previous group claimed to be the enemy: the Tutsis. Police brigadier P8 explains how he tried to halt the violence, even if that meant problems for him personally: *“The conseiller asked the burgomaster for a gun to protect himself. I refused. I was the one who had the key to the area where we kept the weapons. I refused categorically. The conseiller shook his head. His attitude changed”*.²⁰² P8 states that he helped to hide Tutsis refugees and helped them escape to Tanzania. P8 tried everything he could, the Tutsis who died were not his fault: *“Let me just say that the cause of these massacres was the gendarmes who didn’t help us. Even while we were trying to help people, the gendarmes in the vehicle kept telling peasants to keep going, with gestures of support”*.²⁰³ Former Burgomaster Jean-Paul Akayesu presents himself in a similar way. He states that as burgomaster, he organised patrols and security as soon as he heard of violence against Tutsis in a neighbouring commune. *“I supervised the patrols myself together with the communal police. I worked round the clock, day and night. [...] The situation had become chaotic, unbearable. I tried to help the Tutsis even though some of them may have died later. I'm sure that some of them were saved, others died.”*²⁰⁴ As a final statement at the end of the interviews he gives a long list of people he has saved. *“They are Tutsis. Those people are Tutsis. Since as a Bourgmestre, I cannot say that I am only concerned with the Tutsis. Some of the Hutus also suffered. And so I went to work for them as well. For some of them, I was able to do something, for others, [I] tried, maybe unsuccessfully, but I made an effort nonetheless”*.²⁰⁵ Former Interahamwe leader Omar Serushago claimed before the ICTR that he had tried to save his neighbours, thereby risking his own life having fought off other Interahamwe members.²⁰⁶ Through these narratives the perpetrators try to appeal to the new regime, and diffuse their responsibility for the Tutsis that were killed.

Many perpetrators try to show that they did not want to kill, presenting themselves as righteous. Some, like P8, Jean-Paul Akayesu and Omar Serushago tried to actively stop the violence. Others refused to commit violence. They were however not able to stop it from happening. Teacher P9 also tells a story where he refused to kill Tutsis in a *cabaret*, he was the only one with a gun but he refused to give it away.²⁰⁷ The Tutsis however, were killed by

²⁰² Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 53.

²⁰³ Ibidem, 55-56.

²⁰⁴ Interviews with Jean-Paul Akayesu carried out by the Office of the Prosecutor (ICTR) on 10 and 11 April 1996 in Zambia. Accessed through <http://jrad.unmict.org> Tape II Side A, transcript pages 10-12.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem, Tape VII Side B, transcript page 3.

²⁰⁶ Statement by Omar Serushago, February 3, 1998. Accepted by ICTR, 25-6-2003.

²⁰⁷ *Cabaret* is used in Kinyarwanda (Rwandese) for a small eating/drinking establishment.

others with machetes.²⁰⁸ Tailor and farmer P12 describes how at a meeting, a Tutsi approached him: “*You see that people are being killed, can’t you do something for me?*” *I told him that I could do nothing but I did not want to be among those who delivered him [to God]*”.²⁰⁹ Farmer P14 states that, at a similar meeting, he as a Christian couldn’t do ‘what the others were doing’, and went home.²¹⁰ Even though their claimed morality and righteousness did not make an actual difference for the victims, the perpetrators do find a way to represent oneself as a morally ‘good’ person and, maybe more importantly, side themselves with the Tutsis.

As this section demonstrates, perpetrators find different ways of representing oneself as righteous or heroic. At different stages, whether it is being interviewed by a scholar in or outside prison, or by representatives of the justice system, similar frameworks can be discovered. Both in narratives of pride and heroism for protecting the country and its people, the perpetrators use the language of the old regime, as well as narratives of moral righteousness and protecting victims, where the use of the language of the new regime is visible at all stages. Through these narratives, the perpetrators claim ‘membership’ of what they consider the state, and what they consider to be Rwandan. They use the narratives to claim citizenship of Rwandan. The next part analyses a different method perpetrators use to reconstruct the past and narrate their own role within it: denial and silence, and, importantly, justification for the violence perpetrated.

Denial, silence and justification

This section does not provide narratives of pride. Narratives of denial and silence denounce personal responsibility or knowledge of violence. Other narratives justify the violence as means to an end, a final, desperate solution to a problem. Interesting in the Rwandan case is that the perpetrators use the new regime’s foundational narrative, the narrative that denies ethnic differences, to deny knowledge of the ethnic tensions and violence preceding the genocide.

Bitero, who as an Interahamwe leader was well aware of the organisation of the genocide, denies any previous knowledge: “*His [the president’s] death shook us up, panic drove us into the killings, and I found myself right in the middle of the genocide*”.²¹¹ Ignace Rukiramacumu explains the same ‘surprise’ the escalation of violence was to him. He

²⁰⁸ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 58-59.

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 70.

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 73

²¹¹ Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 169.

explains the killing of men, but later also women and children, ‘a gradual process’: “*These detailed killings took us by surprise, if I may say so*”.²¹² P19 explains that the Hutus and Tutsis lived together peacefully and in harmony: “*We heard on the radio, “Look for the enemy no matter where he is; he is your neighbour!” After that, the Tutsis fled to the high mountains. After their flight, a war followed that I do not know how to explain. We were together, and then at a certain point, we began to fight each other, without there having been any argument between us*”.²¹³ The foundational narrative of Hutu Rwanda was clear with everyone, the ethnic division between Hutus and Tutsis were also known to those living peacefully together. Not knowing how to explain the violence, claims a certain level of naivety and innocence in the perpetrator.

Ignace Rukiramacumu explains his strategy of silence, both to the outside world as to himself: “*It’s just as damaging to tell the truth to the justice system, to the population, or to yourself. Even in your heart of hearts, it is riskier to remember than to forget. Reason why I try to keep quiet with myself. The time to hear the truth about these things surpassing ordinary crimes will wait*”.²¹⁴ Silence on the past is the easier way out. Metaphors and euphemisms serve this same goal, to silence and downplay the past events. Nyamata farmer Alphonse Hitiyaremye explains the day to day killings, and the conduct of his ‘colleagues’: “*But other colleagues were slow, they did not dare – they hit the arm instead of the neck, for example, then ran away yelling, “That’s it, I killed this one dead!” But everyone knew it wasn’t true. A specialist had to intervene, catch up with the target, and dispatch it*”.²¹⁵ The words ‘specialist’, ‘target’ and ‘dispatch’, conceal the actual meaning of ‘killer’, ‘victim’ and ‘murder’. Farmer Pancrace Hakizamungili, from the same region of Nyamata, describes his day to day activities with similar euphemism: “*Torture was a supplementary activity, resulting from an individual decision or a small meeting. It was just a distraction, like a recreational break in a long work day. The orders were simply to kill. [...] Me, I struck quickly without worrying about it. I did not think about such fiendishness, I was hurrying to get through the day’s schedule*”.²¹⁶ Torture is described as ‘supplementary activity’ or ‘distraction’ during the day’s ‘schedule’. The killings seem to have been like a normal work day. Former soldier, police officer and farmer Élie Mizinge provides a similar metaphor for the violent past when describing the perpetrators’ relations to their wives: “*After all, they*

²¹² Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 179.

²¹³ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 85-86.

²¹⁴ Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 120.

²¹⁵ Interview Alphonse Hitiyaremye in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 36-37.

²¹⁶ Interview Pancrace Hakizamungili in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 129-130.

[women] *themselves had to go looting, too, to deal with hunger, since the crops were being neglected. The men, the women – no upset came between them during the killings. The men went out to kill, the women went out to pillage; the women sold, the men drank; it was the same as with farming*".²¹⁷ The task division of killing is explained through the task division of farming, thereby clarifying the women's' role in the genocide.

Besides the denial of knowledge or the silencing of past events, the denial of personal responsibility is prominent in perpetrator narratives as well. Bitero justifies his involvement as follows: "*Me, I was born Hutu, I did not choose this, it was God. I massacred some Tutsis, and then the Tutsis killed some Hutus*".²¹⁸ He furthermore states that he was loyal to his party, trusting their judgement of the situation: "*I was more implicated because I was more faithful to the party [MRND]*" [...]. "*If I hadn't acted, it wouldn't have changed a thing, because everyone was in agreement, each in his own capacity. I tried my best to support what was considered the right thing to do at the time*".²¹⁹ Personal responsibility is shifted to the larger –political or ethnic- group. P6 has a more simply, and seemingly honest explanation: "*I participated in order to protect my family. If you did not participate and you had Tutsis in your family, it was difficult to escape.*"²²⁰ His wife was a Tutsi. By presenting themselves as without agency, they obscure their personal responsibility and rid themselves of guilt.

Another striking narrative the perpetrators use to explain the violence they perpetrated in the past is the explanation of violence – or war- as having its own moral system. Committing violence requires the perpetrators to transcend from the 'normal' moral framework, into a different moral framework. A framework in which the moral rules of conduct no longer apply to the (future) victims. The perpetrators use this narrative extensively, explaining their temporal loss of moral norms and values. By focussing on the temporality of it, they represent themselves as basically good human beings, who have only gone astray because of the situation. Farmer and voluntary deacon Fulgence Bunani explains his personal escalation into the genocide: "*We became more and more cruel, more and more calm, more and more bloody. But we did not see that we were becoming more and more killers. The more we cut, the more cutting became child's play for us. [...] We stopped thinking about obligations or advantages – we thought only about continuing what we had started. In any case, it held us so tight, we could not think about its effect on us*".²²¹ Bunani describes

²¹⁷ Interview Élie Mizinge in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 111.

²¹⁸ Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 144.

²¹⁹ Ibidem, 172.

²²⁰ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 49.

²²¹ Interview Fulgence Bunani in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 50-51.

spiralling into violence until it was out of control, or at least, beyond his. Léopold Twagirayezu describes a certain apathy he experienced during the killings: *“I felt nothing, just let him [victim he just killed] lie. I looked around; killing was going on every which way. I kept pursuing the other fugitives all day long... It was sweaty-hard and stimulating, like an unexpected diversion. I didn’t bother to keep count.. at the time of those murders I considered them unimportant and didn’t even notice the tiny thing that would change me into a killer. [...] We no longer considered the Tutsis as humans or even as creatures of God. We had stopped seeing the world as it is, I mean as an expression of God’s will. So we found it easy to wipe them out”*.²²² The world became different to Twagirayezu, with different (moral) rules. Alphonse Hitiyaremye explains this ‘different world’ as well, a world in which weddings, baptisms or even Sundays mass were no longer important. The perpetrators feasted whenever they wanted, because they were in power to do so, they felt mighty: *“We did not find that kind of celebration interesting anymore. We did not care spit for that Sunday silliness. We were dead tired from work, we were getting greedy, we celebrated whenever we felt like it, we drank as much as we wanted”*.²²³ Jean-Baptiste Murangira acknowledges the same sentiment: *“The more we killed, the more greediness urged us on. Greediness- if left unpunished, it never lets you go. You could see it in our eyes, bugged out by the killings”*.²²⁴ Bitero agrees too, *“Our arms ruled our heads; in any case our heads no longer had their say”*. It was “madness” all by itself.²²⁵ Théoneste Bagosora, as a leader of the army, provided a macro level explanation of the situation. He states before the ICTR representatives that it was the anger of the population, including soldiers because they too are “full-fledged citizens”, that made the killing of the Tutsis happen.²²⁶ The people were temporarily out of their mind.

The other side of the narrative of violence and its own moral system concerns the victims of the genocide. This new type of moral world dehumanises the victims to make them indeed undeserving of ethic treatment. Interestingly is that the narratives include both a past sentiment of dehumanisation, a sentiment experienced during the conflict, as well as a sentiment of victim dehumanisation that continues in the present. Nyamata farmer Pio Mutungirehe explains how he was able to kill the people who used to be his neighbours: *“We no longer saw a human being when we turned up a Tutsi in the swamps. I mean a person like*

²²² Interview Léopold Twagirayezu in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 24-25.

²²³ Interview Alphonse Hitiyaremye in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 94-95.

²²⁴ Interview Jean-Baptiste Murangira in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 49.

²²⁵ Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 50.

²²⁶ Interview Théoneste Bagosora, 28 October 2002, ICTR. Transcript of Col. Bagosora Commentary.

us, sharing similar thoughts and feelings. [...] *Savagery took over the mind*".²²⁷ Persons no longer 'like us', undeserving of normal ethic treatment. Ignace Rukiramacumu explains the same feelings on Tutsis among him and his 'colleagues'. A combination of apathy within themselves and dehumanisation of the Tutsi victims: "*They had become people to throw away, so to speak. They no longer were what they had been, and neither were we. They did not bother us, and the past did not bother us, because nothing bothered us*".²²⁸ Many also use the word *Inyenzi* to describe the Tutsis, meaning cockroaches. P15 for example states that "*We said we had to hunt for the accomplices, those Inyenzi who had killed the head of state, they had to be exterminated*".²²⁹ The Tutsis were no longer human, they were vermin to be exterminated. And even though some perpetrators remained rational up to a certain level, Léopold Twagirayezu for example explains that he rationally knew that his Tutsi neighbours were not responsible for the death of president Habyarimana, however, "*We thought all Tutsis at fault for our constant troubles. [...] They had become a threat greater than all we had experienced together, more important than our way of seeing things in the community. That's how we reasoned and how we killed at the time*".²³⁰ He does not dehumanise them, and rationally knows they were not guilty, but emotions took over and legitimise Twagirayezu's atrocities. Ignace Rukiramacumu goes even further in blaming the Tutsis for their own fate: "*We imagined an existence without them [the Tutsis]. At first, we favoured getting rid of them without actually killing them. If they had agreed to leave – for Burundi or other likely destinations – they could have gone and saved their lives. And we wouldn't have piled up the fatalities of the massacres. [...] That pushed us towards the machetes*".²³¹ The Tutsis could have saved themselves, now they are not only responsible for their own fate as well as Ignace's and his fellow perpetrators' fate, suffering in the present.

These narratives meant to deny, silence and justify the violence allow perpetrators to put themselves in a different light. These narratives of self-representation and legitimisation spark no admiration. Excuses and justifications are provided for acknowledged misdeeds. The next part of this chapter provides a different narrative yet again. A narrative in which the perpetrators claim victimhood.

²²⁷ Interview Pio Mutungirehe in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 47-48.

²²⁸ Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 47.

²²⁹ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 77-78.

²³⁰ Interview Léopold Twagirayezu in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 121.

²³¹ Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 231.

Victimhood

A third strategy for perpetrators to represent themselves is through a narrative of victimhood. Different lines of strategy can be followed. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, perpetrators shift blame to, and claim victimhood of different groups or elements. In the first strategy they are either victims of the situation or victims of the previous regime, by which they align themselves with the already recognised victims. The second strategy supports a narrative of victimisation by the post-conflict regime or situation. This way, they claim victimhood while at the same time still opposing themselves from the recognised victims.

The first strategy of presenting oneself as victim is by claiming to be a victim of the situation. The timing, coincidental location or age made one complicit. Bitero describes these circumstances beyond his control: *“You will never see the source of a genocide. It is buried too deep in grudges, under an accumulation of misunderstandings that we were the last to inherit. We came of age at the worst moment in Rwanda’s history: we were taught to obey absolutely, raised in hatred, stuffed with slogans. We are an unfortunate generation”*.²³² He and his peers are victimised by the circumstances as an entire generation. Bunani describes his sentiments during the killing, explaining it was not easy: *“It was much better to kill strangers than acquaintances, because acquaintances had time to stab you with an intense look before receiving the blows. A look from a stranger pierced your mind or memory less easily”*.²³³ Alphonse lay awake at night over his actions: *“The blood struck terror into me. It stank and dripped. At night I’d tell myself, After all, I am a man full of blood; all this spurting blood will bring catastrophe, a curse. Death did not alarm me, but that overflow of blood, that – yes, a lot”*.²³⁴ The perpetrators’ victims are not mentioned in these narratives of victimhood, the perpetrators themselves, and their feelings, are. They claim victimhood for themselves, not recognising the misery of their victims they made themselves.

Some perpetrators do recognise the Tutsis’ suffering next to their own, leading to a narrative of universal victimhood. Bunani states that he believes that *“.. the consequences have been most unfortunate for us all. The others [Tutsis] have gathered in many dead. But we, too, have met with perilous hardships in the camps and a wretched life in prison. In exile, sickness robbed me of two children, my mother, some compatriots, and I am suffering from this imprisonment. Time has punished me for my misdeeds and can allow me to begin an ordinary life again when I leave here. After those killings and those ordeals, I no longer see*

²³² Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 173-174.

²³³ Interview Fulgence Bunani in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 123.

²³⁴ Interview Alphonse Hitiyaremye in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 49.

evil the way I used to: I am going to become a more normal person".²³⁵ Bunani equals the suffering of the victims with his own suffering in exile and prison. 'Time has punished him', he is cleansed of his misdeeds through his own suffering (equalising himself with his victims), and ready for reconciliation and the future.

The narrative of personal suffering can take a different direction as well: that of self-pity. Ignace Rukiramacumu considers his position in society if he gets to leave prison: "*I am a good farmer, and I no longer own even one basic tool. My children have scattered far and wide without sending me comforting words. I receive no news about the soundness of my house. [...] I feel disappointed by all I have lost. When I get out, I think I will manage for food. But comfort and respect, as before – I can tell already these things are gone for good*".²³⁶ Rukiramacumu lost everything, his house and way to make a living but more so his place in society, making the future seem difficult. Alphonse Hitiyaremye claims to experience the same thing. After his release from Rilama prison he went back to Nyamata, but life was not the same: "*But most of all I've changed economically. Losing wealth keeps my intelligence from negotiating as before; I shy away from decisions, I don't spent money quickly anymore, I no longer hire extra hands. I've lost the business courage I had before the killings. I no longer feel at ease. I miss the prosperity that has abandoned me*".²³⁷ It is their personal situation, their personal suffering, that the narrative focuses on, calling for understanding and pity from the audience.

Other narratives use regret and remorse within the victimhood narrative. The perpetrators' regret is eating at them, and they ask pity for their suffering conscience. Léopold Twagirayezu explains that he "trembled for the truth" and "felt his heart ache". He tried to explain his story in truth to all who wanted to hear it and apologise to the victims. The victims did not respond as wished (forgiving) and it resulted in mockery from his prison companions, but still he continued.²³⁸ Fulgence Bunani regrets his actions in the past, but mostly fears his future in prison: "*Me, I don't rid myself of the serious memories; I regret misjudging events and I regret the people who were killed. I thought wrong, I went wrong, I did wrong. An evil is spoiling my life, and my days are steeped in misery*".²³⁹ These perpetrators show regret. Although it is impossible to know whether that regret is sincere or not, the perpetrators use

²³⁵ Interview Fulgence Bunani in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 191-192.

²³⁶ Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 193.

²³⁷ Interview Alphonse Hitiyaremye in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 222.

²³⁸ Interview Léopold Twagirayezu in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 26.

²³⁹ Interview Fulgence Bunani in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 157.

this narrative to present themselves as changed persons, people who share in the suffering and as fellow citizens of Rwanda deserving of some pity and recognition.

The second main strategy when claiming victimhood is to claim being a victim of the former authoritarian government. The perpetrators' former peer group and its leaders are shifted from allies to abusing enemies. The perpetrators align themselves with the recognised victims through this narrative, as they switch their position from the guilty side to the innocent side of the binary division between victims and perpetrators. Two different groups can be discovered within this group of perpetrators: those who claim to have been indoctrinated or persuaded, and those who claim to have been forced directly.

The first are the perpetrators who claim to be a victim because of the control and indoctrination they succumbed to. Farmer P12, who even had a Tutsi wife, states that he and his colleagues “fell into the trap of ‘enemy’”, which provoked the killings in a later stadium.²⁴⁰ P15 states that they were really afraid of the RPF, stories about their cruelty were spread among the Hutu population.²⁴¹ They had not thought about Tutsis as enemies before, but the regime's indoctrination changed their way of thinking. P1 agrees with this indoctrination, and how vulnerable the Rwandans were to it: *“The Hutu authorities thought they would lose power. [...] These authorities began to tell people that Tutsis are mean. I will tell you that Rwandans, we are like cows. When authorities say move to the left, we move to the left. The authorities made the population believe that the Tutsis would kill us. That is how the war started. [...] Hearts changed, little by little, because of what these authorities said”*.²⁴² Adalbert Munzigura mentions the famous Rwandan hate radio who indoctrinated the minds of the Hutus: *“The radios exaggerated to get us all fired up. “Cockroaches”, “Snakes”- it was the radios that taught us those words. The evil-mindedness of the radios was too well calculated for us to oppose it”*.²⁴³ These perpetrators blame the authorities for indoctrinating their minds. Musingura, for example, stated that before he did not find any of the bad qualities that the Tutsis were accused of having, in the Tutsis he knew personally. Pancrace Hakizamungili makes a similar statement on indoctrination by the radios, saying that they were “prepared the right way”, they were made ready for genocide.²⁴⁴ Alphonse Hitiyaremye used this strategy as well after he had been released from Rilama prison, and awaited Gacaca justice. He attempted to claim a level a victimhood and shift of responsibility by stating that

²⁴⁰ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 66.

²⁴¹ Ibidem, 75.

²⁴² Ibidem, 39.

²⁴³ Interview Adalbert Munzigura in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 220.

²⁴⁴ Interview Pancrace Hakizamungili in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 71.

they, the Hutus, were pushed by “very eloquent authorities”. Individual responsibility, according to Hitiyaremye, is therefore hard to establish, or even useless: “*Today, to distinguish the harm done by each man. Going to beg pardon of one specific person, that’s worthless, that’s already a waste of effort*”.²⁴⁵

Being a victim of indoctrination might reduce responsibility, but it also demonstrates a certain naivety or weakness. The second group of perpetrators that claims to be a victim of the former regime presents itself stronger, more unyielding – but only morally. They claim to have been forced to participate in the violence under the threat of violence and death for themselves and their families. Pio Mutungirehe explains that you could not get away with not participating: “*.. anyone with the idea of not killing at all could not let on, or he himself would be killed while others watched. [...] Voicing disagreement out loud was fatal on the spot. [...] Your position and your fortune could not save you from death if you showed a kindness to a Tutsi before unfamiliar eyes. For us, kind words for Tutsis were more fatal than evil deeds*”.²⁴⁶ Mutungirehe was forced to make a moral decision on who would suffer, he himself or the Tutsis. Farmers Andrew Mugabo and Ezekeil Mukaragye testify to similar situations, when interviewed upon their release from prison. Mukaragye states that he saw people who refused to kill being killed themselves on the spot. When they asked him to participate he “had no alternative but to go ahead and kill”. Mugabo declares his lack of agency and therefore lack of responsibility for his misdeeds: “*I was forced to kill; I only wanted to stay alive. It is our leaders who should be blamed for what we did, not us*”.²⁴⁷

An argument in these narratives is the danger and fear of being accused as a Tutsi accomplice. This meant severe personal danger if you refused to kill. Gikongoro farmer P2 describes the story of his participation in the genocide. His brother had a Tutsi wife, while she and their children were slaughtered, his brother survived and was brought to a healthcare centre. P2 himself had provided some shelter and food to fleeing Tutsis during the onset of the genocide. P2 gives a horrible account of his visit to his brother in the hospital: “*When I arrived, the burgomaster said, “You, you have brought food for the Tutsis. So that you do not begin again, you take a machete and you have to decapitate your brother”. I refused. The burgomaster asked the reservist to force me to decapitate my brother and said if I refused the reservist would kill me. The reservist took me and gave me a machete. He put a gun behind*

²⁴⁵ Interview Alphonse Hitiyaremye in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 205.

²⁴⁶ Interview Pio Mutungirehe in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 76.

²⁴⁷ ‘Freed Genocide Convicts Begin Journey Home’, *The East African* (Nairobi) March 31, 2003.

my head and said: “If you do not cut, I will fire”. So I cut. That is my crime”.²⁴⁸ The story is told without much further emotion, P2 maintains his moral values in the representation of himself while confessing. Being accused of being a ‘Tutsi accomplice’ was just as dangerous as being a Tutsi, declares also P19 –who was only 16 years old in 1994. He replaced his father in the killings, as his father was very ill. The Interahamwe made his life extra difficult: “I was told, [...] “We know that you are also Tutsi accomplices”. I said we were not Tutsi accomplices. They said, “To prove it, you have to kill this person”. I thought if I did not kill him they would kill me because they had just accused our family”.²⁴⁹ These narratives seem persuasive, as all audiences can agree on the need to protect your own life and your family’s. While none of these stories can be fully trusted, the next narrative by Jean Baptiste Murangira is a proven lie. He claims to have been forced to slaughter a man because he himself was married to a Tutsi. The Interahamwe asked him to prove his loyalty to the Hutus, in order to save his wife’s life. The crowd who had gathered supported this and put force on Murangira: “The crowd had grown. I seized the machete, I struck a first blow. When I saw blood bubble up, I jumped back a step. Someone blocked me from behind and shoved me forward by both elbows. I closed my eyes in the brouhaha and I delivered a second blow like the first. It was done, people approved, they were satisfied and moved away. I drew back. I went off to sit on the bench of a small cabaret, I picked up a drink, I never looked back in that unhappy direction. Afterward I had learned that the man had kept moving for two long hours before finishing”.²⁵⁰ Many witness accounts tell of the eagerness with which Murangira murdered the man, creating two very contrasting narratives. Through this narrative the perpetrator presents himself as morally upstanding and forced to commit violence. He wants to be considered a good man, without any agency to have acted differently.

Even in the higher ranks perpetrators claim a lack of agency. Akayesu, claiming how he helped the Tutsis, states: “The problem is that, and it has to be admitted, that I am only one person, I was overwhelmed by the events”.²⁵¹ Former commander in the Rwandan army Leonidas Rutasera claims a similar lack of agency to prevent violence, even though he did not share the hatred for Tutsis and desire for genocide. During a meeting in the organisation of the genocide he did not share the feelings of the hard liners, however: “The hard-liners prevailed over the moderate members of the commission who, however, had to keep a low profile for

²⁴⁸ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 40-41.

²⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 86.

²⁵⁰ Interview Jean Baptiste Murangira in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 23.

²⁵¹ Interviews with Jean-Paul Akayesu carried out by the Office of the Prosecutor (ICTR) on 10 and 11 April 1996 in Zambia, Tape III Side A, transcript page 13.

*their own safety. [...] he [Bagosora] considered me an enemy, as I did not share his views”.*²⁵² The narratives of obedience (after indoctrination or force) that claim victimhood from the former regime are different from those of the Argentinean perpetrators. Whereas they often took pride in their military obedience, the Rwandan perpetrators frame obedience as strict force that incriminated them.

The fact that the perpetrators, who claim to have no personal responsibility, as they had no agency to refuse killing, are imprisoned while many of the – responsible- organisers are free is extra difficult for them. The perpetrators feel betrayed by their former leaders, both in the past for misleading them, as well as in the present for letting them take the fall for the crimes. Jean Bosco Buginigo claims the same innocence because he was forced. He does not deserve punishment, the leaders do: *“Officials in the army, government, and everybody who had a responsibility in MRND deceived us into killing innocent people. Now they themselves have escaped. They do not deserve to live; they should be punished because they misled so many people to do terrible things”.*²⁵³ The leaders are the ones who deceived (betrayal in the past), and they are also the ones living free today while Buginigo himself suffers in prison (betrayal in the present). Adalbert Munzigura airs a similar sentiment of betrayal. Both he and the leaders are underserving of their – very opposite- positions in present society: *“The educated people were certainly the ones who drove the farmers on, out in the marshes. Today they’re the ones who juggle with words or turn close-mouthed. Many sit quietly in their same places as before. Some have become ministers or bishops; they aren’t so much in the public eye, but they still wear their fancy clothes and gold-framed glasses. While suffering keeps us in prison”.*²⁵⁴ Joseph-Desiré Bitero expresses the same simply: *“That is how good and bad luck happen in one party. The thinkers got the genocide going, and the militants paid for the damage”.*²⁵⁵

The narratives of victimhood do not only focus on the diffusion of responsibility. A central element in the perpetrators narratives is a confrontation with themselves. Past events are put in a different light, and the perpetrators claim to see their own action differently now. These narratives of confrontation provide the perpetrator to show a certain level of remorse, as well as present oneself as a new and better person, a citizen, deserving a position in the new Rwandan society. While still imprisoned in Rilama, Ignace Rukiramacumu tells a story

²⁵² Interviews with Leonidas Rutasera, 27 November, 3 December 1998, 1, 8 & 20 February 1999 (ICTR).

²⁵³ African Rights, *Rwanda, Death, Despair and Defiance* (London 1995) 999. MRND was the political party to which president Habyarimana belonged.

²⁵⁴ Interview Adalbert Munzigura in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 182.

²⁵⁵ Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 173.

of Tutsis they burned alive in a mine shaft. The memory haunts him: *“It is going to stalk me with no warning, since I live not far from the mines. I had not foreseen that this memory would work at me so viciously”*.²⁵⁶ Years later when he is released he narrates the ‘bigger picture’: *“We said we were working for good: our own good, obviously, the good of the Hutus. Time now points its finger at us for the evil we did to the Tutsis. The defeat changed famous patriots into infamous criminals. That’s history, life-size. It’s a big mistake not to have heard it knocking at the door”*.²⁵⁷ History changed his perspective of the past and on himself. Élie Mizinge tells a similar story: they used to make fun of and laugh at Tutsis who begged and prayed for their lives, right before killing them, *“Now the memory of those prayers just gnaws at my heart”*.²⁵⁸ Adalbert Munzigura tells a story of how he shot two children, just because he wanted to test his new gun: *“It was almost pleasantly easy. I walked on without bending over to check that they were really dead. I don’t even know if they were moved to a more suitable place and covered up. Now, too often, I am seized by the memory of those children, shot straight out, like a joke”*.²⁵⁹ Perpetrators present memories that haunt them to show how much they have changed.

P4 and P12 both state that they confessed because they were finally able to see their past actions as they were. P4 says *“I understood that what I did I shouldn’t have done”*.²⁶⁰ P12 blames his past “ignorance”. *“My conscience could not stand what I did. That is why I chose to show my responsibility and the responsibility of all those who participated with me. Also, I want these things not to begin again, and I want to ask everyone for pardon”*.²⁶¹ Alphonse Hitiyaremye claims, after his release from prison, that he became a different person: *“I feel something more human in my regret for what I did. I’m no longer the Alphonse of before”*.²⁶² Pancrace Hakizamungili represents himself similarly:

“I think I am a better Pancrace than the one before the killings, because from now on I have an idea of the person I was: I have seen myself greedy and bloodthirsty. But I am chastened. I am a man improved by the experience of those cruel things; I know that I have abandoned malice along the way. I was pulled into savagery with my colleagues, I obeyed terrible men of authority, I took part in the expeditions waving my machete. I’ve returned destitute to my land. I know the heavy consequences of my misdeeds. Despite everything, my personality resembles what it was. I was a good and pious boy; I have become a

²⁵⁶ Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 158.

²⁵⁷ Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 122.

²⁵⁸ Interview Élie Mizinge in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 143.

²⁵⁹ Interview Adalbert Munzigura in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 25.

²⁶⁰ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 46.

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 71.

²⁶² Interview Alphonse Hitiyaremye in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 222.

better and more pious boy, that's all. If I may put it this way, I have been purified by wickedness".²⁶³

Both Hitiyaremye's and Hakizamungili's declarations are striking examples, as they are both made after release from prison, but before Gacaca justice. They recognise their own misdoings, but are purified or cleansed by suffering and they claim to be different persons today. They are good people, deserving a position as free citizen in the new Rwanda.

The third narrative of victimhood consist of perpetrators who remain stuck in the language of the previous regime. They claim to be victims of the present regime, society and their means of justice. Many perpetrators accuse the regime of being (disproportionally) revengeful. P20 wants the new government to "give up on vengeance", because the Rwandans want to live together in peace and security.²⁶⁴ Bitero even claims that his conviction (death sentence) is a direct result of this vengeance: "*I was tried at a time when the survivors felt too much anger. They expected some kind of punishment, and the new authorities wanted to give them a spectacular revenge*".²⁶⁵ Théoneste Bagosora also claims to be demonised by the RPF to secure his sentence, 'despite of his innocence'.²⁶⁶

The revenge the government wanted on the perpetrators is, according to them, also visible in the unfair trials they are subjected to. Jean-Paul Akayesu makes the recurrent complaint that his trial was predetermined and that (associations of) witnesses lied in their testimonies against him: "*It has become common currency in this country that cases are settled before a Commission of Enquiry is set up. You know that people you do not even know will come up and accuse you. I even know that there are associations for this. And I also know that people are coerced, even beaten up to give false testimonies*".²⁶⁷ P8 also considers his trial unfair and predetermined. He claims that the prosecutor never presented the statements and evidence from his side of the story, determining his fate through this action.²⁶⁸

The circumstances that are the result from this vengeance, exile and imprisonment are a further element in the narrative of victimhood. Alphonse Hitiyaremye states that his dreams do not torment him often: "*On the contrary, it's mostly this wretched prison life that cuts into my sleep*".²⁶⁹ Pancrace Hakizamungili complains about prison as well: "*In prison, malaria and cholera have taken a heavy toll. Fear of vengeance has killed. The miserable life here*

²⁶³ Interview Pancrace Hakizamungili in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 223.

²⁶⁴ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 89.

²⁶⁵ Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 172.

²⁶⁶ 'From prison in Yaounde, Bagosora explains himself', Interview Théoneste Bagosora.

²⁶⁷ Interviews with Jean-Paul Akayesu carried out by the Office of the Prosecutor (ICTR) on 10 and 11 April 1996 in Zambia, Tape III Side B, transcript page 5 and Tape IV Side B, transcript page 4.

²⁶⁸ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 58.

²⁶⁹ Interview Alphonse Hitiyaremye in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 158-159.

and fights have killed, but regrets – never. Life proves too vigorous against regrets and the like".²⁷⁰ The alternative of exile is framed as a similar misery to which they were condemned. P22 states that he lost two children and their mother while on the run in Zaire, the outrageous punishment for his crimes.²⁷¹ Bagosora expressed his and his family's misery in exile as well, besides his unfair legal treatment. He asks the Cameroonian government (where he was in exile) to take care of his family: "*It seems that while we are here in jail, and they [ICTR] have several complaints, that they [families] are being mistreated by the people in government, by the police and by others. In fact, ever since we have been in jail our families have been suffering. [...] I am confident. I trust in the fairness of the ICTR and I would like to go before it and plead my case. I am suffering in jail for nothing*".²⁷² The mistreatment by either the new Rwandan government in prison, in exile because of force fleeing and by the legal authorities who prosecute them support the perpetrators' narratives of victimhood. Their own suffering is central to the narrative, their violent actions are left out. While not necessarily equalising themselves with the recognised victims (as they ignore them completely), the perpetrators use their narratives of self-representation as victim as a request for different treatment: to be treated as an equal citizen.

After their release however, the perpetrators continue a narrative of victimhood. No longer directly subjected to the justice system (although many await their Gacaca trial which might reconvict them), the perpetrators find it difficult to return to their normal lives. Even though they have served prison sentences, they cannot find proper reconciliation with the Tutsis, still feeling accused and unaccepted. Alphonse Hitiyaremye describes feeling "ill at ease" living together, in the same village, with the Tutsis. "*The thing is, the Tutsis know less than the killers about what happened, because they themselves were always scared or running away. Today they ask for details of the killings. At the first words, they get angry! Then they calm down and want to hear new information. We toss out some more, but the real truth, the atmosphere, if I may say so, cannot be told*".²⁷³ Ignace Rukiramacumu accounts the same difficulties, the Tutsis he speaks to do not want to hear his story and his truth: "*It's not possible to come to an understanding about something so serious. You try to tell how you killed a relative; he gets angry. You dodge a question; he gets equally angry*".²⁷⁴ Joseph-Desiré Bitero avoids speaking about his crimes for he considers it hellish and the

²⁷⁰ Interview Pancrace Hakizamungili in Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: the killers in Rwanda speak*, 161

²⁷¹ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 91.

²⁷² 'From prison in Yaounde, Bagosora explains himself', Interview Théoneste Bagosora.

²⁷³ Interview Alphonse Hitiyaremye in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 79-80.

²⁷⁴ Interview Ignace Rukiramacumu in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 78-79.

consequences are to dire: *“Because afterward, society can hate you beyond all understanding if you reveal a situation that society does not wish to believe: a truth it calls inconceivable”*.²⁷⁵

The victimhood expressed by the perpetrators is not only experienced in the interactions with Tutsis. Memorialisation and lack of history contribute to their status of victim. Their narrative, their past is delegitimised or ignored. Bitero (already mentioned in the previous section) praised the revisionist books for they contain his truth, which is otherwise ignored. Théoneste Bagosora complains about the mono-ethnic Tutsi memorialisation of the past, the remembrance monuments for only the Tutsis being erected throughout the country. *“These monuments must constantly remind the Tutsis that they were the targets of the “genocide by the Hutus”. These are symbols of the permanent and collective culpability cast over the Hutus. [...] The Kigali regime is thus manipulating public opinion by making people believe that the skulls on display [in a museum for victims] are those of Tutsis”*.²⁷⁶ The perpetrators claim victimhood for unfair treatment in the post conflict society.

The featured Rwandan perpetrators use different strategies to convey a message. Their narratives of self-representation and self-legitimation switch from protectors of the state and ethnic group, to victims without agency and victims of the present day’s regime and society. The vertical hierarchy is narrated by all, although not a single perpetrator explains it in a positive light (like many Argentinean perpetrators). Forced obedience created a lack of agency and a downward moral spiral which was beyond the perpetrators own control. The final section of this chapter will analyse the perpetrators different narratives and strategies in relation to the dynamics of memory politics and memory in Rwanda. As demonstrated are the memorialisation and dominant narratives in Rwanda controlled strictly by the new (victim based) authoritarian regime. Rwanda makes a good example of victimhood nationalism. The section will analyse how perpetrators try to appeal to this dominant group in society, and reclaim their citizenship in the new Rwandan state.

Perpetrators in society

Within the social construction that is memory, the individual appeals to the collective, giving his own memories meaning and shape through the shared narrative and identity. The dominant narrative in Rwanda on the ethnic tensions and past has changed over the years. Before the civil war and genocide the Hutu regime propagated a foundational narrative of

²⁷⁵ Interview Joseph-Desiré Bitero in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 94-95.

²⁷⁶ ‘From prison in Yaounde, Bagosora explains himself’, Interview Théoneste Bagosora.

Rwanda based on a Hutu majority. In their narrative, the Hutus were the rightful Rwandan citizens, they were the prime political community the state served. Tutsis were alien, former feudal lords, a minority, deserving of a lower hierarchical status in Rwanda. This foundational narrative, which determined the Rwandan core identity changed after the genocide. The Tutsis took control of Rwanda, and have been able to dominate the narrative ever since 1994. The narrative has been static, and has only changed in a more radical direction, instead of into a more inclusive version. The Tutsi controlled government propagates a narrative to create a unified Rwanda. It attempts to eliminate the ethnic differences, including the ethnic tensions, between Hutus and Tutsis. The strategy they use borders denial: ethnic differences between Hutus and Tutsis are denied, written off as colonial inventions aimed at creation tensions between otherwise unified Rwandans. The dominant narrative is therefore focussed on a third party, responsible entities that no longer exist: the colonial rulers and the previous Hutu regimes. The element of memorialisation is however interesting. While ethnic differences are denied, and a united Rwandan identity is promoted (even partly invented for the cause) the memorialisation of the genocide remains ethnically divided. The genocide is described as ‘the genocide against the Tutsis’. The Tutsis are the ones considered victims, the ones deserving to tell their story and the ones eligible for reparations and compensations. Even though the government claims to have eliminated ethnic differences and promote a unified Rwanda, it allows only one group to remember the past publicly, giving that group dominance over public memorialisation even though all the Rwandans are supposed to support this. The Hutu population, which makes up the large majority of society, is denied their version of the past.

As stated, the dominance of the Tutsi government over the public memory sphere has not grown more inclusive. The *ingando* system tries to brainwash the Hutu population and the regular educational system does not provide a more detailed or inclusive narrative either. Critical junctures, which led to changes in the dominant narrative such as in Argentina were absent in Rwanda, or only changed things for the worse. Reports and protests from national and international human rights organisations were delegitimised or even punished harshly. The state has grown more paranoid, and holds on to their dominant narrative of the past, as well as its contradicting strict binary division between victims and perpetrators in society.

The perpetrator narratives of self-representation and legitimisation reflect the dominant narratives in society. Perpetrators, especially right after the genocide ended, chose the language of the old regime, presenting themselves as heroes who fought against the danger of the RPF and all Tutsi accomplices, protecting the Rwandan (Hutu) state from threat. The narrative of heroism or patriotism is however a bit more nuanced. While some

perpetrators still hold on to this narrative, many legitimise themselves through claiming that they consider themselves heroes or patriots back then. They present their narrative as a past perfect tense. Their claim of heroism rests on their previous belief in the former regime's narrative. They allow themselves to be considered heroes, but adapt their story of heroism to today's dominant narrative, thereby appealing to the present narrative and core community of citizens. They show a confrontation with their past self and a clear break with that past self, attempting to gain recognition for both their past heroism and present insightfulness.

Some perpetrators however use the heroism narrative to reflect the new regime's narrative. They claim to not have been really aware of ethnic differences, and always having lived in peace with Tutsis, being friends, working together and even intermarrying. Their narratives of heroism comprehend rescue stories. By claiming to have rescued, or tried to have rescued Tutsis they present themselves as 'colour-blind' to ethnicity, thereby following the new dominant narrative, and as a citizen that respects human rights.

The perpetrators claiming victimhood represent this same transition in dominant narrative. The perpetrators presenting themselves as victims through the actions of the new regime mostly narrated their stories in the years immediately after the genocide. They claim they are the victims of Tutsi revenge and unfair trials. Perpetrators presenting themselves as victims later in time present themselves as victims from the former regime or violent situation, adapting to the language of the new regime. They blame the situational circumstances (created by the former regime) or the regime and their leaders directly, feeling betrayed by them in both the past and the present. Interestingly there is another group that has claimed victimhood of the present society in recent years. These perpetrators present themselves as victims because they are not accepted by the Tutsi population after their release from prison, they are not understood nor given a chance to tell their story.

As demonstrated, some perpetrators claim victimhood through the language of the old regime, claiming to be victims of revenge by the victims. However, most who present themselves as victims use the language of the new regime. They side with the recognised victim population, the Tutsis, to cross the binary line in society from perpetrator to the side of the victims. They attempt to reclaim their citizenship by assimilating to existing victimhood nationalist narrative of suffering caused by the previous Hutu regime, while at the same time following the narrative of denying ethnic differences. The final part of this chapter will focus on the specific appeal these perpetrators make to the prime political (victim) community through their language, in order to reclaim their position as citizens in Rwandan society.

The language many of these perpetrators appropriate is the language of the new regime. The regime's goals of creating a de-ethnicised Rwanda, in which all live in harmony (albeit under Tutsi rule), and maintaining the Tutsis as central victim group, allowing them the 'genocide card', are propagated through the state media, education and the ingando camps. It is interesting to see that many perpetrator appropriate the language they have learned in Ingando when presenting both the conflict and themselves after their release. Language many of the same perpetrators did not use when interviewed in prison years before. Pancrace Hakizamungili for example states that the education provided to him in the Ingando camp finally taught him the true Rwandan history, including education on colonisation and the previous Hutu republics. *"Everything was new to me – except the genocide, of course"*. They also taught them how to handle the survivors when they returned in their villages, to show patience and never speak directly of the killings: *"Very useful lessons on behaviour"*.²⁷⁷ P15 present a similar narrative: *"Before the war of 1990, I did not know how to differentiate Hutu from Tutsi. I even had a Tutsi wife"*.²⁷⁸ When P12 was asked why he confessed to his crimes he uses a similar type of language: *"I told you there was ignorance. Afterward, we were taught. I had relationships with people who were killed. I saw that for me, my conscience could not stand what I did. That is why I chose to show my responsibility and the responsibility of all those who participated with me"*.²⁷⁹ P12 was ignorant, but he was taught the true meaning of history by the new regime, and he is ready to leave prison as a new, reformed, man. P19 even blames Satan as 'guilty third party'. He "moved into people" who lacked education (like himself) and changed them into animals.²⁸⁰

As shortly mentioned in the first part of this chapter, the government promotes the end of ethnic differences while at the same time keeping the division between ethnic groups when it comes to claiming victimhood. This contradicting strategy therefore leaves a door open for Hutus to claim victimhood as well, under the banner of universal, de-ethnicised suffering. After all, all Rwandans can be considered victims of the guilty third party that the regime blames, the previous Hutu regimes and colonialism. Pancrace Hakizamungili repeats the truth he was taught on the past, but does manage to claim some level of victimhood for the Hutus as well, thereby legitimising himself as 'fellow victim' alongside the Tutsis:

"If no one tampers with it, the truth never deceives. This is indeed true; many Hutus were shot by the soldiers of the Patriotic Front on the hills and later in the

²⁷⁷ Interview Pancrace Hakizamungili in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 80-81.

²⁷⁸ Straus and Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, 75.

²⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 71.

²⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 85-86.

camps in Congo. Many Hutus were dispatched by fatal illness in prison as well. Still, their losses cannot compare to those of the Tutsis. Hutus were not cut in a program of extermination. They did not see their babies, still at the breast, slammed against walls, or the mamas cut short at the legs. It's clear today that we are not weak and traumatised like the survivors. The negationists blow on the embers of hatred, they spark confusion in the minds of those living together in hopes of better days. They naysayers aim to sting the survivors' nerves, and so thwart all good understanding".²⁸¹

Ezekeil Mukaragye makes a similar comment, diffusing ethnic differences and emphasising universal suffering. Most remarkably however, he is the only perpetrators speaking of united Rwandans as a unified block, a block that has to take on the future together:

"I know many of my family members were killed during the war but it is time that we looked at each other as Rwandans, as one people, and worked for the good of our country". [...] "Since I was released from prison and started attending the Ingando, I have realised that we need to work together as Rwandans and that it was the government, that divided us. I went to prison a non-believer but while there I was saved and that is why when they came asking for those who were ready to confess to the crimes they committed, I did not hesitate to go forward and confess".²⁸²

By denouncing ethnic differences, just like the new regime, and emphasising all they have learned in prison and Ingando the perpetrators are able to present themselves as reborn. They unite themselves with the victim group already recognised (the Tutsis) and copy the language of the regime of moving forward as one unified nation of Rwandans. Through these strategies of self representation and self legitimisation the perpetrators are able to present themselves as citizens who are ready to re-enter society under the conditions of the new regime.

²⁸¹ Interview Pancrace Hakizamungili in Hatzfeld, *The Strategy of Antelopes: Rwanda after the Genocide*, 205.

²⁸² 'Freed Genocide Convicts Begin Journey Home', *The East African* (Nairobi) March 31, 2003.

Conclusion

Memory and narrative, both for individuals and for collectives, change over time. Furthermore, narratives convey a message from the individual or collective to the rest of society. Memory and narrative display the narrator's identity, or, their desired identity. The narratives analysed in this thesis belong to perpetrators of mass violence in Argentina and Rwanda. The messages they want to send and the identity they want to project are not necessarily true memories or stories. Moreover, they are more likely to be lies and cover-ups in favour of the perpetrators and their acts of perpetration. The narratives are aimed at creating legitimisation for themselves, and to reclaim a position in society. The central research of this question has therefore not been to determine the truth on violent actions. It has been to see how perpetrator narratives of self-identification and legitimisation have shifted over the post-conflict years in Argentina and Rwanda to reclaim citizenship.

The perpetrator narratives have been analysed in relation to the changing dominant narratives in each respective country, and the changing ideas of core community and citizenship. In Argentina the dominant narrative in society has shifted a lot since 1983. While at first, the war narrative of two equal 'demons', the military and the guerrillas, as propagated by the military itself was dominant, it shifted under influence of human rights organisations and victim organisations. The critical junctures they created through protests and legal action led to the dominance of the narrative of state terror, and reopened prosecutions on perpetrators of mass violence in 2006. The dominant group in society were the victims, who finally gained recognition through memorialisation and reparations, and through the acceptance of their version of history as the true, legitimate version.

Argentinian perpetrators, in order to legitimise themselves and claim membership and citizenship of the Argentinian society, changed their narratives as well. The war narrative was dominant at first, the legitimisation that they had protected the country and its people from an internal terrorist threat, combined with denial of personal knowledge of or responsibility for what the perpetrators strategically call 'excesses'. With the dominant narrative in society shifting to state terror, the perpetrators needed a new strategy. Citizenship in society was based on recognition of the victims' memories and stories. In general, perpetrators took one of two strategic paths. The first path was to join the side of the victims, and thereby hope to lose the identity of perpetrator. These perpetrators claimed victimhood from the conflict itself, or from the authoritarian regime they had served. Whether the perpetrators' narratives focussed on suffering from alcoholism and insomnia because of the violence they had perpetrated, if

they presented themselves as scapegoats while their former commanders were out in freedom, or whether they claim to have had no agency themselves during the violent period: they appeal to the recognised group of victims. The perpetrators try to cross the binary line between good and evil, between victim and perpetrator, by presenting themselves as victims of the same entity as the other victims: the previous regime, and thereby silence their own guilt.

The other strategy to claim victimhood is more interesting because it could be considered illogic, if you take the dominant narrative in modern Argentina into consideration. These perpetrators claim to be victims of the new regime and society. They state for example that they are the scapegoats of the new regime, political prisoners because the regime is revengeful and they claim to suffer from inhumane circumstances in prison and unfair trials. These perpetrators are stuck in the narrative that they are the true national heroes of the state, and try to delegitimise the new regime as well as the recognised victims. Interestingly enough these perpetrators do use the 'new' language of human rights and human rights violations, thereby using the language of the new regime and society.

The analysis of the Rwandan perpetrator narratives led to some different, but also to many similar patterns and strategies when it comes to self-identification and self-legitimation. The dominant narrative in Rwandan society concerning the genocide has not changed as much as it has in Argentina. Since 1994, the authoritarian Tutsi-led government strictly controls memory and narrative in Rwanda, only legitimising the Tutsi version of the past. But what has shifted is the foundational narrative of the Rwandan state, in comparison the 'Hutu version' that had been dominant up to 1994. The narrative of Hutus as the dominant group in society, and the Tutsis as alien invaders shifted towards a foundational narrative that rejects ethnic differences and only recognises 'Rwandans'. The foundational narrative that divided the country along ethnic lines, and its propagators: the colonial rulers and the previous Hutu regimes, became the ones to blame for the violence of 1994. What is even more interesting, is that although the government seems to reject ethnic differences in the new Rwanda, the remembrance of the genocide still focusses on the Tutsis as victims, hence the name "genocide against the Tutsi". The dominant group of citizens in society is the Tutsi group, and their version of the past is legitimised, as the government effectively eliminated all opposition.

Similar to the Argentinian case, many Rwandan perpetrators present themselves as heroes of the nation. Remarkable is that both lines of 'foundational narrative' are followed with regard to the idea of who belongs to that nation. A large group of perpetrators

emphasised the need to protect the people from the Tutsi threat, while others claim to have tried to protect Tutsis as well as Hutus. The first group continues to use the language of the old regime, while the second group appeals to the new regime and new dominant citizen group in society. Another element in the Rwandan perpetrator narratives is the presentation of violence and war as having its own moral system (they understand this moral system remarkably similar to academic experts). Both the new moral framework in which they operated themselves and in which they belonged together in serving the state, as well as the dehumanisation of victims are present in these narratives. The third remarkable element within the perpetrator narratives is the claim of victimhood from the former regime. Similar to the Argentinian perpetrators, many feel betrayed by their former superiors and by the former regime. However the claim that the perpetrators were being indoctrinated or forced directly is more prominent in the Rwandan case. Furthermore, hardly anyone claimed victimhood of the present regime, only a few complaints of not being understood or accepted by the Tutsis in their villages are mentioned. Whether this is mere self-presentation, or the *Ingando* indoctrination has really worked, is impossible to discover.

There are several striking differences between the two case studies. First is the fact that obedience in the Argentinian case is both presented as positive (pride in military obedience and loyalty) as well as negative (lack of agency), while the Rwandan perpetrators represent obedience as purely negative (even though both groups present obedience as strictly vertically). No pride is taken by the Rwandan perpetrators in the fact that they were indoctrinated or forced to obey the leaders of the genocide. Second is the element of denial in the Argentinean perpetrator narratives. They include both denial of knowledge and denial of personal participation. Not a single Rwandan perpetrator has denied his role in the violence, the only element denied is the importance of ethnic differences before the genocide, a strategy used to appeal to the new regime. The third remarkable difference is the fact that in Argentina there are many claims of victimhood with regard to the new regime and society. They present themselves as scapegoats, persecuted by the current government and betrayed by the entire nation. Hardly any Rwandan perpetrators claim victimhood of the present regime, they only mention difficulties being accepted by the Tutsi locals after their release from prison.

Some differences may be explained by the fact that Argentina's military has a continuous influence on society, making the use of the war narrative and identifications as hero or patriot more logical than in Rwanda. Rwanda does not have a similar military culture and most of the perpetrators interviewed were civilians, not soldiers as in the Argentinian case. Furthermore Rwanda has an authoritarian regime, in which the dominant narrative was

more controlled than in Argentina, and in which the perpetrators had been indoctrinated through for example *Ingando* camps. These differences make the existing similarities more interesting and remarkable, because in these two different cases, a big similarity can be found in the dominant strategies behind the perpetrator narratives.

The most important similarity that my research has discovered is that the perpetrators, whether Argentinian or Rwandan, try to find ways to connect to the community of citizens in the respective countries by using one of two strategies. The first strategy is from the perspective of the old regime. Perpetrators identify themselves as true patriots or heroes (with high personal moral, often denying responsibility for excesses), legitimise themselves by blaming the victims, downplaying the violence, or claiming by to be victims of the present regime and society. In these strategical narratives the perpetrators still consider the former regime, their beliefs, and the former core community of citizens and idea of citizenship legitimate. Through their narratives of self-identification and legitimisation they try to appeal to this core community by reminding them of what was and which service they did to their country and its community of citizens. The second strategy serves the position of the new regime and society, and considers the new order and community of citizens the legitimate one. These perpetrators present themselves only as heroes when it comes to helping victims. Mostly they claim to have had no agency to act any different from how they have acted, and identify themselves as victims from the former regime or conflict. They have been indoctrinated or forced, and lied to and betrayed by their former superiors, but they have been confronted with themselves, and they have changed. They put themselves on the side of their own victims, by blaming the larger entity of the former state or their superiors.

These two strategies provide insight in who the perpetrators consider to be the core community of the state, what they consider to be a citizen, and who they consider to be the authority that provides that citizenship and legitimacy: the old regime (and following from there the former idea of citizenship) or the new regime (respectively the new idea of community and citizenship). Remarkably, the perpetrators use the same kind of language while propagating two different perspectives on society. Both groups use the language of human rights and human rights violations, whether it is to claim that they have suffered from them in the past or that they suffer from them in the present. Furthermore, both groups appeal to the idea of victimhood nationalism, and try to get recognition and acceptance by presenting themselves as victims as well.

Many of the elements discussed in the theory on perpetrators narratives are found in my research. Many of the perpetrators who strategically appeal to the old regime and

community of citizens describe a collective in-group or participation identity to which they belonged, and to which the relation was strengthened while perpetrating violence, similar to what Gould and Kühne have found in their research. Furthermore they continue to glorify the in-group, and blame the outgroup – the victims – for their own misfortune, like Rostica found in the Guatemalan case. On the other side, elements as described by Castañeda, Passmore, and Neitzel and Welzer, for example perpetrators who claim to have had no agency or that the violent situation was out of control, are also present in many perpetrator narratives in this study. These perpetrators, appealing to the new regime and core community, try to avoid Tilly's 'justice detector'.²⁸³ Closely related to this is Fritz's idea of perpetrators who have had a confrontation with themselves, and feel betrayed. Their worldview was destroyed, but they claim to have changed and be better persons now. Many perpetrators in this study provided similar legitimisations in their narratives.

The perpetrators tried to reclaim citizenship in their country, through one of the above described two strategies. They wanted to belong again to the core community of the state, the community that the state serves, the dominant group in society. Clark and Goodale argued that globalisation effects on the idea of citizenship changed the idea of a good citizen from national patriot into a citizen that respects human rights. Within this concept of citizenship, victims of human rights violations take a high hierarchical position in the ladder of victimhood nationalism. Violating human rights puts one immediately outside of the community of victims. As McEvoy and McConnachie argued, victimhood demands complete innocence in order to be accepted in society. Perpetrators, however, try to present themselves as victims through different narratives. They claim victimhood as a loss of their future, personal devastation, and loss of control and innocence, as Scott discovered. My research shows that these elements are used by perpetrators both in relation to the past and to the present, thereby creating an identity as victim of the past or the present.

This thesis demonstrates that perpetrators use different kind of narratives to present their identity and create legitimacy for themselves. Narratives as 'performance' by perpetrators, including – as Payne described – script, stage and timing, are used to send a message. Perpetrators try to find a way to make their narrative heard within a community that focusses on the side of the victors, who are simultaneously the victims. Researching perpetrator narratives of self-identification and self-legitimation in relation to the concept of citizenship has proved a fruitful combination, and can be exemplary for further research. Ideas

²⁸³ Charles Tilly created the idea of a 'justice detector': who is to blame is determined by who had, or is perceived to have had, responsibility, agency and competence to have committed the crime.

on citizenship and the core community in a country provide insight into the reasoning behind the perpetrator narratives, such as who they address, to whom they appeal, whose language they use and who they consider the core community of citizens. As the dominant narratives in society changed, partly related to new ideas of citizenship and belonging to the core community of the country, perpetrators narratives adapt. All strategies are eventually aimed at being recognised and included in the community of citizens, and shift along with the dominant narrative in society and the core concept of citizenship.

The methodological and theoretical framework used in this thesis can serve as an example for future research on perpetrators. The inclusion of more case studies could provide more comparative insights in both specific shifts in perpetrator narratives as well as in the relation between perpetrators and the specific situations – for example concerning transitional justice – in their countries. Besides more case studies, including other groups such as victims and witnesses could give insight into the ways in which they try to hold on to and strengthen their own position. Understanding of ideas of who the core community of a state comprehends, in contrast to whom citizenship does not apply, is crucial for reconciliation in post conflict states. These perpetrator narratives of identification and legitimisation, aimed at reclaiming citizenship and a position in society, demonstrate the core structure of the state in which the perpetrators reside. The perpetrators use their narrative to get the recognition of the core community, and thereby reclaim their position as citizen.

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Appendix I

Testimonies Argentina

Jorge Eduardo Acosta

Declaration trial (March 18, 2010)

- language former regime, blaming victims
- agency
- victim new regime

Final words (October 20, 2011)

- agency
- lack of truth, betrayed by former superiors
- denial

Emilio Herrero Anzorena

Card from prison (2014)

- victim of new regime
- patriotism and heroism
- martyrdom
- lost memory and narrative

Alfredo Astiz

Interview Trespuntos (January 16, 1998)

- downplaying crimes, cleaning metaphor, no other choice as justification
- betrayal, means to an end, the greater good
- soldier mentality
- blaming victim
- heroism/pride 2x
- military moral and honour, obeying orders 2x
- victim of present regime,
- betrayal 3x
- victim of previous regime
- downplaying crimes, delegitimising victims
- denial/silencing 2x
- no remorse

Declaration in ESMA trial (March 10, 2010)

- patriotism
- agency

Final words in ESMA trial (October 30, 2011)

- victim new government 5x
- military ethics, obedience
- accusation of de-contextualisation by court
- appropriating language of human rights
- national hero, reverse victim-victimiser roles

Martín Balza

Statement (April 25, 1995)

- victim of situation
- heroism
- downplaying crimes
- universal guilt
- betrays his fellow comrades / denounced obedience
- changes military system Argentina

Jorge Félix Búsico

Testimony trial (July 17, 1985)

- betrayal
- personal moral
- metaphors
- remorse / feelings of complicity

Carlos Capdevilla

Declaration (march 12, 2010)

- denial

Final words (October 13, 2011)

- victim / psychological problems
- victim of society and army, betrayed

Jesus Orlando Cappellini

Testimony trial (April 24, 1985)

- denial
- war narrative

Ricardo Cavallo

Declaration (April 8, 2010)

- unfair trial, victim new regime

Final words (October 30, 2011)

- narrative
- military structure/ agency
- victim unfair trial / new regime scapegoat
- victim blaming
- human rights of him violated

Julio César Coronel

Declaration (April 8, 2010)

- military ethics

Final words (October 13, 2011)

- denial

Adolfo Donda

Declaration trial (March 12, 2010)

- compliance
- military obedience / agency

Declaration trial (March 31, 2011)

- betrayed by former superiors with silence
- compliance fellow comrades / agency
- Immorality of war

Final words (October 30, 2011)

- martyrdom
- victimhood hierarchy / universal suffering
- reverse victimhood / victim of present government and society
- scapegoat
- military ethics
- war narrative

Alberto Eduardo González

Final words (October 30, 2011)

- denial

Rodolfo Aquilino Guerra

Testimony trial (April 24, 1985)

- denial

Victor Ibañez

Confession television (1995)

- remorse
- reconciliation

Guillermo Enrique Bruno Laborda

Confession to Roberto Bendini (June 2004)

- betrays former superiors
- personal absolution / trauma
- agency / obedience
- heroism / military ethics

Armando Lambruschini

Testimony trial (October 22, 1985)

- denial

Luis Maria Mendia

Testimony trial (April 23, 1985)

- military ethics
- war narrative
- denial / downplaying

Salvio Menendez

Testimony trial (April 24, 1985)

- denial
- war narrative /justification

Cristino Nicolaides

Testimony trial (April 24, 1985)

- denial
- patriotism / protector of nation
- war narrative

Antonio Pernías

Testimony Senate (October 1994)

- blaming situation / dirty war
- military ethics
- betrayal of fellow soldiers/leaders
- agency
- no laws in war justification
- euphemisms

Declaration trial (March 19, 2010)

- scapegoats

Declaration trial (August 26 2010)

- military ethics
- lack of agency
- metaphor/euphemism

Final words trial (October 19, 2011)

- martyr / reverse victim roles
- lack of agency
- appropriating human rights language
- absence of full history
- foundational narrative state
- patriotism
- human rights violated / agency
- victim of new regime
- reverse victim-victimser roles / victimhood nationalism
- betrayed by society
- denial/downplaying
- military code

Molina Pico

Statement (May 4, 1995)

- euphemism
- patriotism / nationalism

- heroism
- scapegoat
- victim new regime
- foundational narrative
- silence
- reconciliation
- silence and reconciliation / victim of conflict
- betrayal by society

Juan Carlos Rolón

Testimony senate (October 19, 1994)

- pride nationalism
- blame former regime 2x
- blame / victim or situation 2x
- military moral
- denial
- lack of agency /obedience 2x

Declaration (April 8, 2010)

- military ethics/war narrative
- betrayal state

Declaration in ESMA trial (July 8, 2010)

- military ethics
- betrayal present government

Final words ESMA trial (October 21, 2011)

- victim present government
- betrayal
- military ethics

Néstor Savio

Final words (October 21, 2011)

- victim present regime, lack of compensation
- victimisation of his family
- delegitimising victims / critique narrative
- absent memory
- agency / obedience orders /
- betrayal by former superiors
- protector of nation / duty

Raúl Scheller

Declaration trial (March 19, 2010)

- military ethics / obedience
- personal morality

Final words (October 30, 2011)

- delegitimise victims
- victim of new regime

Adolfo Scilingo

El Vuelo (1995)

- soldier mentality
- blaming victim
- heroism/pride /patriotism
- military moral and honour, obeying orders
- victim of present regime
- betrayal
- victim of previous regime
- downplaying crimes, delegitimising victims
- denial/silencing / euphemisms
- no remorse
- confrontation with past
- psychoogical problems

Ernesto Facundo Urien

Testimony trial (June 1985)

- military ethics
- betrayal

Antonio Vanek

Testimony trial (April 23, 1985)

- denial

Pablo García Velasco

Final words (October 30, 2011)

- denial
- victim trial

Eugenio B. Vilaro

Card from prison (2015)

- pride / nationalism
- victim blaming
- victim of new regime and society

Roberto Viola

Testimony trial (April 24, 1985)

- victim present regime
- military ethics /obedience
- patriotism
- martyrdom

Organisations

Asociación Civil de Abogados por la Justicia y la Concordia

‘10 questions about the military and police trials’

- victims present regime
- unfair trial
- downplaying crimes
- victims of terrorism
- victims of present society
- human rights violated by trial and imprisonment

‘Comienza un día sin Justicia y sin Concordia. Dos mil presos políticos’ (daily)

- victim present regime

AFyAPPA: Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de los Presos Políticos de Argentina

‘About us’ (website 2017)

- victims present regime
- heroism / nationalism
- war narrative

‘A former soldier said there were fraudulent compensations’ (October 8, 2011)

- victims present regime
- no recognition / absent memory
- universal suffering
- complete memory
- patriotism / heroism

‘The Political Prisoners of Argentina’ (October 10, 2011)

- victims of present regime
- war narrative and excesses
- blaming victims
- political prisoners

‘The two truths of the 1970s’ (February 15, 2017)

- absent memory / narrative from public debate

‘The two truths of the 70s: the strongest moments of an unedited debate’ (February 22, 2017)

- war narrative
- victim present regime
- no remorse / justification
- obedience / agency

Centre for Legal Studies on Terrorism and its Victims (Celtv)

‘What is the Celtv?’ (website 2017)

- victims of terrorism
- victims of present government
- political prisoners

- over-contextualisation of conflict

Interview in La Gazeta with Celyv leader Victoria Villarruel (February 29, 2016)

- victims of present (kirchner) regime
- alternative narrative
- de-contextualisation (de-politisation) ‘victims’
- victimhood hierarchy

Fuerzas Armadas

Documenta final del junta militar sobre la guerra contra la subversion y el terrorismo (April 28, 1983)

- national heroes / patriotism /pride /Christian values
- justification methods
- war narrative

Unión de Promociones

‘Objectives’, ‘Purpose’ and ‘Its evolution’ (website 2017)

- political prisoners
- complete memory / narrative
- war narrative
- victims present regime

Appendix II

Testimonies Rwanda

Jean-Paul Akayesu

Interview 1996

- personal moral / protector and hero fitting new regime 6x
- victim new regime / revenge 2x
- delegitimising witnesses and victims
- lack of agency 2x

Judgement ICTR 1998

- lack of agency
- victim of present regime / trial for revenge

Anonymous Interahamwe member

- war narrative

Théoneste Bagosora

Interview Africa International 1996

- scapegoat 2x
- war narrative / victim blaming 2x
- victim new regime / memorialisation
- personal suffering / victim present

Interview ICTR 2002

- narrative tutsi domination (old regime)
- war narrative / morality of violence
- victim blaming / war narrative 2x

Joseph-Désiré Bitero

Machete season

- denial responsibility 2x
- suffering/victim of present 3x
- morality of violence/war
- victim previous regime
- nationalism/patriotism and obedience

Strategy of antelopes

- scapegoat / stuck in language previous regime
- whole truth / narrative on the past
- indoctrination and victim blaming / war narrative

Jean Bosco Buginigo

- victim former regime
- peer pressure / forced (obedience Interahamwe)

Fulgence Bunani

Machete season

- morality of violence / victim situation 2x
- force / obedience
- remorse / victim present situation
- victim situation/new government and cleansed through suffering

Strategy of antelopes

- cleansed through suffering / new person
- confrontation past / indoctrination / victim past situation

Pancrace Hakizamungili

Machete season

- obedience / morality of war
- obedience / force / indoctrination
- morality of war and violence 2x
- euphemism / personal moral
- victim present / personal suffering

Strategy of antelopes

- historical narrative new regime
- denounces victimhood / recognises suffering tutsis / narrative regime
- confrontation past / narrative regime / personal moral
- new person

Alphonse Hitiyaremye

Machete season

- euphemism 2x
- dehumanising victim / personal suffering and victimhood
- no remorse / cruelty 2x
- heroism / morality of violence
- some remorse (personal suffering) 2x
- peer pressure / obedience

Strategy of antelopes

- victim blaming / victim present situation
- confrontation past
- morality of war / euphemism
- victim present regime / revenge
- confrontation past / personal suffering
- obedience / force / personal suffering

Élie Mizinge

Machete season

- morality of violence / personal moral
- euphemism

- dehumanising victims and remorse
- remorse and reconciliation

Andrew Mugabo

Interview The East African 2003

- lack of agency / obedience / force

Yuliana Mukanyarwaya

- victim former regime
- peer pressure / force

Ezekeil Mukaragye

Interview The East African 2003

- force / fear / obedience
- language new regime

Devota Mariya Mukazitoni

- victim former regime
- peer pressure / forced (obedience Interahamwe)

Jean Baptiste Murangira

Machete season

- victim former regime
- peer pressure / force
- morality of violence
- victim of past situation
- nationalism / force / obedience

Pio Mutungirehe

Machete season

- morality of violence / dehumanising victim
- dehumanising victim / obedience / morality of violence
- force / pressure / obedience
- blaming victim
- obedience / personal moral
- peer pressure / obedience 2x

Strategy of antelopes

- obedience / morality of violence
- obedience / indoctrination / war narrative

Adalbert Munzigura

Machete season

- remorse / personal suffering
- patriotism / morality of violence / euphemism
- victim previous regime/leaders

- indoctrination

Strategy of antelopes

- morality of violence

Ignace Rukiramacumu

Machete season

- patriotism / obedience
- pride in skill
- dehumanising victim
- personal suffering
- denial knowledge
- victim situation / personal suffering
- victim blaming

Strategy of antelopes

- victim blaming / victim present situation
- silence
- patriotism / confrontation with past
- morality of war / obedience / euphemism
- personal suffering / victim present

Leonidas Rusatira

Summary interviews 1998 and 1999

- denial
- personal moral
- personal moral / protector and hero fitting new regime

Omar Serushago

Declaration 1998

- personal moral / protector and hero fitting new regime
- obedience

Léopold Twagirayezu

Machete season

- morality of violence / no remorse / dehumanisation victim
- morality of violence 2x
- heroism/ patriotism / personal moral
- dehumanising/ blaming victim
- personal moral

Strategy of antelopes

- morality of violence / dehumanising victims
- remorse
- personal moral

P1

- indoctrination / obedience
- morality of violence / indoctrination
- nationalism

P2

- force

P3

- war narrative / victim blaming 2x
- nationalism
- war narrative / nationalism

P4

- force / obedience 2x
- personal moral
- confrontation past

P5

- war narrative
- narrative old regime
- victim blaming / indoctrination
- war narrative / obedience

P6

- force / victim previous government
- victim blaming
- justification / war narrative / remorse

P7

- force / fear

P8

- personal moral 2x
- victim of trial / present regime

P9

- force / obedience / personal moral
- force / fear 2x

P10

- force / fear
- personal moral / responsibility
- morality of violence / fear / obedience

P11

- force / obedience / fear / personal moral

P12

- indoctrination / fear / obedience
- force / fear 3x
- personal moral
- indoctrination / victim past regime

P13

- force / fear / obedience

P14

- personal moral
- morality of violence
- force / obedience

P15

- fear / war narrative / indoctrination
- historical narrative new regime
- war narrative / victim blaming
- remorse / personal moral
- morality of violence
- war narrative / indoctrination / nationalism

P16

- nationalism / heroism / war narrative / obedience
- remorse

P17

- obedience / force/ fear
- option of refusal (contradicting)

P18

- war narrative / victim blaming / language old regime 2x
- obedience / nationalism
- force / obedience / nationalism / war narrative

P19

- denial narrative / indoctrination
- diffusing responsibility / language new regime
- fear / force

P20

- diffusing responsibility / language new regime
- obedience / force

- war narrative
- obedience / force / fear / nationalism / war narrative

P21

- war narrative / indoctrination
- war narrative / victim blaming

P22

- obedience / indoctrination / war narrative / nationalism
- obedience / war narrative
- personal suffering / victim of present
- morality of violence
- victim previous regime

P23

- lack of agency
- obedience
- personal suffering