



After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness? Cultural Representations of Reconciliation in Rwanda

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This article examines a small number of documentary films made since 2000 which focus on the post-genocide situation in Rwanda. It begins by tracing some of the debates about the contested versions of national unity and reconciliation produced by the RPF-led government, which seeks, at least at the level of its rhetoric, to transcend the politics of ethnicity and to end once and for all the culture of impunity which is seen as one of the root causes of the genocide. Acknowledging that the government has achieved a measure of peace and security in a relatively short space of time, critics argue that ethnicity is, however, still an issue in Rwanda and that there is an official RPF narrative – ‘we are all Rwandans now’ – which many academics, journalists and NGO officials have bought into, while at the same time ignoring the elements of authoritarianism and the suppression of dissent which, it is claimed, mark the behaviour of the ruling, Tutsi-dominated elite. The documentary films are analysed in the context of these conflicting accounts of the complexities of the reconciliation process and are shown as cultural practices which reflect upon the contradictions and tensions manifested in the attempts to find top-down solutions to problems which require sensitive deployment of local knowledge, local resources and the experiences of everyday life in still predominantly rural Rwanda.

Keywords: documentary, ethnicity, *gacaca*, genocide, Hutu, memorial, reconciliation, RPF narrative, Rwandan, Tutsi

With the fifteenth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda imminent, it is perhaps time to reflect on the progress made towards peace and reconciliation. In the years since 1994, the reconciliation process has involved

the establishment of a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), numerous workshops, re-education camps for former perpetrators, as well as a proliferation of monuments, museums, memorials, national commemoration days, novels, films and art installations. For the purpose of this article, I shall concentrate mainly on a small sample of documentary films.¹

A number of academic critics including Pottier (2002), Mamdani (1996), Newbury (1988), Jefremovas (1997) and Zorbas (2004), have argued that one of the principal obstacles to effective reconciliation has been the dominant RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) narrative which has attributed the genocide mainly to its roots in the colonial period (1894–1962), constructed a harmonious version of pre-colonial Rwanda and rubbished the findings of historians in the postcolonial era since 1962.

Pottier has produced the most extensive critique of what he calls ‘re-imagining Rwanda’, a master narrative of knowledge construction orchestrated by the RPF government and its president Paul Kagame, and absorbed and reproduced in its simplifying forms by journalists, NGOs and members of the international community (Pottier, 2002). It is, Pottier claims on the basis of empirical research, a narrative without complexity or context in which the 1994 genocide, the Kibeho massacre of 1995² and the conflict in eastern Zaire, 1996–7, are all re-written in ways which are designed to silence dissenting voices and to represent the RPF and the post-genocide government of ‘national unity’ as above ethnicity and ‘divisionism’ and as a morally superior force acting in defence of Rwanda’s interests. How far this narrative has influenced the production of documentary films and the construction of memory work will be a question raised throughout this article.

Jefremovas has developed the most cogent and succinct argument about the ways in which interpretations of history, especially in respect of ethnicity and statehood, have been used to sustain claims about legitimacy and to sanction policies of inclusion and, more importantly, exclusion from the onset of colonialism in Rwanda up to the present. She claims that contested identities in Rwanda have been subject to reductionist analyses in what she calls ‘a series of fictions: fictions of ethnicity, ethnography and history in Rwanda’ (Jefremovas, 1997: 91). Much of the debate has centred around the nature of the pre-colonial state and what can be described as conflicting reductionisms: in one version, it was a relatively harmonious state based on reciprocity and the ‘mild dominance’ of the minority Tutsi (Basil Davidson quoted in Jefremovas, 1997: 92); in the other, it was an exploitative state dominated by Tutsi invaders (Nahimana, 1987), a perspective which was based on the ‘Hamitic hypothesis’ and which fuelled the ‘Hutu Power’ rhetoric and practice of the genocide. Serious research by reputable and informed scholars of Rwanda in the post-independence period has challenged these simplifications and argued

for an understanding of the pre-colonial state as a complex, dynamic and varied phenomenon. It is this scholarship (both Rwandan and Western) which is used by Pottier to locate, and question, the ideological foundations of the RPF 'official' narrative.

The debate described here is not just a matter of scholarly argument but, more problematically, is related to *perceptions*, both within and beyond Rwanda, about the nature and causes of the genocide and about ways forward to peace and reconciliation – in particular what 'being Rwandan' means.

Rather than colonialism *creating* a Tutsi-dominated state, Jefremovas' survey of the scholarly literature shows that it *inherited* a state already centralised and consolidated by Murami Rwabugiri (1865–95), based upon conquest, assimilation, a Tutsi elite, hegemony and a dependent peasantry, all brought about over an extensive period. Ethnic categories already existed in embryonic form but there is no dispute that these were deepened, systematically classified and racialised under Belgian rule. Nor is there any real argument about the fact that, post-independence, the First Republic was shaped by pro-Hutu, anti-Tutsi ethnicised ideology, or that anti-Tutsi pogroms took place which produced large numbers of refugees. The Second Republic, under President Habyarimana, was characterised much more by regional power differentials than by ethnicised practices or policies. Most Tutsi remained as poor as most Hutu, as class and wealth determined status and power.

Given the scale of the crimes committed in the genocide, the absence of an effective legal infrastructure, and a grossly overcrowded prison system, a certain amount of *dirigisme* by the RPF-led government is understandable. However, it is also claimed by a number of critics that *dirigisme* has crystallised into authoritarianism and that ministerial offices, government administration and non-governmental agencies have become dominated by Tutsi membership, particularly by those from the diaspora.³ It has been argued, by Webley and others, that the 'genocide effect' has been manipulated by the RPF government to criminalise the majority Hutu population, to produce guilt in the international community, and to frame a state-sponsored discourse of reconciliation which is at odds with the day-to-day realities of those in Rwanda trying to live with the pressures and tensions of an uneasy co-existence. On the other hand, it is also acknowledged by many observers and NGO officials that Rwanda is relatively peaceful and secure and that this situation may well be a prelude to the reconstruction of a unified political community, with the RPF acting as midwife in 'the process of healing the traumas of both victims and perpetrators after violence' (Galtung quoted in Webley, n.d.: 14).⁴ However, this somewhat benign view must not be allowed to obscure the human rights abuses, the dissolution of oppositional parties, and the repression of dissent which have been charted extensively in

the country.⁵ As Mamdani and others have stressed, the genocide was *political* and unity and reconciliation can only be brought about by the reconstruction of a political community, unified but multicultural, fully participating in the structures of power.

While it is not possible to extrapolate from local and personal experiences an image of *national* reconciliation, many of the documentary films do at least offer instances of the conditions of possibility for forms of sustainable co-existence, if not total harmony, by showing examples of ways in which relationships between former adversaries are gradually being established and signs of mutuality constructed. Traces of the restorative are evident in many of the films, but at the same time they also demonstrate the levels of fear, anxiety, suspicion, hostility and intimidation which still prevail. Is reconciliation, as some claim, amnesty by default, or another form of the culture of impunity which, some have argued, was one of the root causes of the genocide?

For all the scepticism expressed at times by survivors in *Gacaca: Living Together Again in Rwanda?* there was considerable popular support for *gacaca*⁶ even if it was regarded as the least worst scenario, and, despite some intimidation and even killings resulting from hearings, little or no evidence that the return of hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees, including many *génocidaires*, has brought about the situation feared by two of the women interviewed in the film.

In Rwanda We Say (2004), directed by the award-winning Franco-American director Anne Aghion, turns its attention to the pre-*gacaca* process. This film, together with the earlier *Gacaca: Living Together Again in Rwanda?*, was the product of over seven years' filming. A third film, that deals with the actual justice process itself, is scheduled for release in 2009.

In January 2003 more than 16,000 genocide detainees who had confessed their crimes were released back into their communities, prior to undergoing the *gacaca* process of justice. The film takes this as its starting point and, after a very brief voiceover introduction, focuses on the return of one man, Abraham Rwamfizi, to his village of Gafumba. Each of the three films works primarily with the same people in the same village all the time. As Aghion says, 'how they feel seems to be where the story is' (Aghion, 2007). In an interview, Aghion points out the extreme difficulty of achieving reconciliation – a key concept in the government's ideology – in a small, densely populated country, predominantly rural, where survivors and perpetrators by necessity live side by side. This is a theme which both films develop by showing the complex and contradictory nature of attempts simply to achieve a *modus vivendi*, let alone reconciliation. As Aghion says, peaceful co-existence, or what some have called passive co-existence, is probably the most immediate likelihood after a relatively short period of time.

Any form of documentary inevitably involves a certain amount of staging and the presence of the camera affects the nature of debate and discussion, producing a level of the performative in the participants. *In Rwanda We Say* does not claim to be a 'fly on the wall' as such because, apparently, the villagers asked Aghion to bring them together. This she describes in an interview with Paula Schaap on the *Shooting People* website (Aghion, 2007), when she says that she decided to become more involved personally in this film, unlike *Gacaca* where she remained at a distance and was more unobtrusive. One of the participants had asked her to stop asking questions and to bring them together where she would get 'an interesting conversation'. So this film is more interactive and reflective than the previous one, and more confusing at times, but it has the virtue of being based on the wishes of the participants themselves who, despite the obvious presence of camera, director and crew, achieve a measure of subjectivity and even control in so far as, on occasion, they seem to influence the direction of the discussion. The interview gives a full account of the funding process, the research, shooting schedule, and distribution procedures (it was originally produced for television), as well as providing details of the choice of location, selection of the pivotal (but not necessarily central) figure – Rwamfizi – and the assembling of the crew – Rwandan, North American and French. Budget, technical details (PD150 and PDX10) the role of interpreters and the extensive number of authorisations to film are also described.

The film was made specifically to coincide with the tenth anniversary commemoration of the genocide so it had a finite schedule. Aghion clearly acknowledges that the presence of the camera changes the ways in which people react and behave, and even though there are times when the participants fully engage with each other and seem to forget the camera, mostly the discussions are, one feels, framed and prompted by the film-making process. Nevertheless, the people involved – articulate, combative and distressed – wanted to come together to 'express loudly and clearly, the notion that talking about one's pain is the first step toward healing it' (Aghion, 2007). One of the great strengths of the film is that it enables this pain to be articulated without, as in some of the other films produced, trying to make a simplistic claim about healing. The film is very much a first faltering step, as Aghion herself recognises that healing and reconciliation are a long way off. Some critics have complained that the film ends abruptly, but for me this is one of its positive qualities as it avoids any easy or sentimental resolution.

Gacaca: Living Together Again in Rwanda? (2002), the product of a number of preliminary visits to Rwanda, and several months of research and interviews with government officials, NGO workers, and ordinary Rwandan citizens, was filmed mainly in the Ntongwe district during April 2001 and focuses on a preliminary stage in the *gacaca* system

where almost a thousand people had assembled. The film centres on the official Prosecutor General, an authoritative, patrician, head-teacher-like figure who presents accused prisoners, who have confessed crimes, to the assembled audience in order to establish whether there is still a case to be made against them by people in the local community. Accompanying the prosecutor are officials from the Ministry of Justice taking down statements from witnesses and perpetrators.

The film opens with the radio broadcast of a communiqué from President Paul Kagame announcing that prisoners who have confessed their crimes in terms appropriate to the *gacaca* process (i.e. were not category-one criminals) and who had already served the maximum sentence allowed for by *gacaca* would be provisionally released. It is this release and return which forms the basis of the sequel to this film, *In Rwanda We Say ... The Family that Does Not Speak Dies*, which takes its title from the words of a conciliatory elderly figure who is part of the group meeting in a local bar to confront some of the challenging questions facing those prepared to live together with those implicated in the genocide. This film focuses on Rwamfizi who acknowledges that he was a patrol leader for ten households in the genocide and took part in killings, but denies the specific accusation made by one of his neighbours that he killed her husband. Much of the film revolves around this denial and the ways in which members of the village seek to come to terms with the presence of released prisoners in their midst.

Two women are interviewed together and asked about how they feel about the returning prisoners. They challenge the interviewer, demanding that the prisoners themselves should be confronted, and express fears that they will start killing again. Part of the time they seem to ignore the camera as they discuss with each other their situation in somewhat fatalistic terms and are dismissive of the film crew:

They want to know how we feel about their return ... Why are they asking us? ... Who asks us this? ... Can't you see them? ... These whites ... they ask if we are happy ... why, why? ... we have no choice ... Enough! These whites ask the strangest questions.

Here, as at many other points in the film, the unresolved tensions left by the aftermath of the genocide surface frequently and give the narrative a brittle, provisional quality.

In the lengthy discussion in the bar which is the final segment of the film, these fault lines are made particularly apparent, with some prepared to greet and talk with perpetrators, others who refuse and walk out. It is acknowledged that vengeance, although it might be wished for, is not an option – partly because of sheer numbers – and a pragmatic approach is arrived at with the decision at least to speak with perpetrators and to encourage some form of hospitality. One woman says how memories

of war could not even let her look at or talk to a Hutu but that she has gradually let them come closer to her, as 'we are neighbours'. It is this wary, perhaps also weary, sense of compromise that the film captures with all its contradictions. The framing of this last sequence enacts the provisional nature of the reconciliation achieved by showing the gaps and distances between people, the awkward silences, the small talk about the weather, attempts at humour, and the sense of a continuing dialogue, likely to be fractured and conflicted. A degree of local complicity is acknowledged and at least victims recognise that they are now able 'to talk to their executioners' and, as the elderly man says, speech liberates and when things are revealed, families turn to the future. A form of symbolic closure is reached if nothing else, and the frequent addresses to camera, rather than to each other, indicates the mediating role of the filming process although questions are raised as to whether the measure of co-existence achieved will be sustained after the camera stops running.

Although the film works at the micro level with specific figures on a local level, their memories, conflicts and dilemmas open out onto a larger set of problems facing the country in its attempt to turn to the future – hence the occasional sequences with schoolchildren rather self-consciously being prompted into discussing the issues of vengeance, forgiveness and reconciliation in a fairly abstract fashion.

Produced for the US History Channel, *Rwanda: Do Scars Ever Fade?* uses footage of the genocide killings, a range of Western-based experts, a sonorous, voice-of-God narration threaded throughout the film, interviews with survivors dubbed into English, and a descriptive format. As in a number of the other documentaries, a contrast is established between the outstanding beauty of Rwanda and the graphic evidence of memorials with preserved cadavers, skulls, bones and clothing of those slaughtered, and survivor testimony.

The experts are Samantha Power, Philip Gourevitch and Mahmood Mamdani, George Moose and Romeo Dallaire who all comment on the genocide and its aftermath, and also, in the case of Gourevitch and Mamdani in particular, provide the historical and political background to the genocide. In some ways, this documentary, with its authoritative narration, expert testimony and interviews with President Paul Kagame, might almost be considered the authorised version of the government's attempt to achieve peace, unity and reconciliation. At one point, the narration poses the three central questions raised by the RPF government, 'What is justice?', 'What is reconciliation?' and 'Can they co-exist?'

The fact that the programme used as script consultants Catherine Newbury, one of the most respected of historians of Rwanda, and Mahmood Mamdani, the US-based Ugandan scholar who has written a major study of the genocide, indicates the extent to which it researched the historical context of the genocide and had its version of events verified

by reputable experts. Samantha Power and Philip Gourevitch, who contribute on-camera analysis and comment, have also written highly regarded journalistic accounts (Power, 2002; Gourevitch, 1998), both of which are extremely critical of the failure of the international community, the UN and the US in particular, to intervene in the genocide. Romeo Dallaire, the UNAMIR commander in Rwanda at the time of the genocide, who has written a memoir of the events and has appeared in documentaries based upon his experiences, lends authority and credibility, again in respect of international failures.

As well as interviews with experts, the documentary uses extensive archive of excerpts from the Hutu Power journal *Kangura* and RTLM broadcasts, combined with interviews with killers and survivors. The film uses a dramatic music soundtrack and an explanatory narration which comes close, at times, to the tone of the now-dated classic ethnographic film, and some fairly banal editing. When, in one of the extracts from the Gourevitch interview, he speaks of Rwandans as not being 'emotional' (itself an essentialist claim), the camera cuts to a Rwandan man speaking; the scar on a Tutsi woman's neck is revealed to the accompaniment of melodramatic music and sentimentally linked by the narration to 'the scar on her soul'; and when the same woman – who had a Tutsi mother – travels to meet her estranged Hutu father in prison, the narration constructs an imagined scenario around her: 'As Janet travels, she wonders how she will react ... should she lash out in anger or forgive him? Her dilemma haunts an entire nation.' Inevitably, all those featured in the film will have been selected for their representative function, and most probably in accordance with a conventional notion of 'balance', but the presumption to speak, or even think, for the 'other' is problematic, almost as if the 'native' voice is not sufficient in itself.

In a staged, or reconstructed, scene Janet Uyisabye confronts her father with his alleged genocide crimes, but faced with his denials she is unable to be reconciled with him and the film shows the impasse as she walks away in silence. The encounter is self-conscious and awkward but it is framed within the context of the porousness of ethnic identity (a point made by Mamdani) which partly conforms to the RPF de-ethnicisation policy, but also emphasises how reconciliation is never going to be a simple matter. This is something which the film reiterates constantly.

The complexity of reconciliation is also shown in the exchanges developed between a survivor, Pierre Twambe, and the man who killed members of his family, Ezekiel Ntampaka. The men had been neighbours, played soccer together, and attended the same church. Ezekiel had served five years in prison, confessed his crimes and been released pending a *gacaca* trial. Pierre looks to *gacaca* for resolution, and there is an interview with Fatuma Ndangiza, president of the NURC, who sees *gacaca* as bringing

about healing. However, the film indicates how apprehensive many are about the process, with perpetrators fearing exposure and survivors retaliation. It was these fears, together with evidence of abuse, corruption and intimidation, which, among other issues, led to the abandonment of *gacacas* in November 2007.

Ezekiel is a born-again Christian, having been converted in prison, and he acknowledges his crimes at a public meeting. He works with the charity World Vision on a reconciliation project building new houses for survivors. In one of the more sentimental documentaries, which use testimonies in an instrumental way as part of a specific, Christian evangelical agenda (for example, *The Diary of Immaculée*, or *Living Forgiveness*), the antagonists would embrace in an act of reconciliation. One of the strengths of this film is that, although the two men are filmed together, and shake hands at one point, it is made clear that for Pierre the whole experience has left him uneasy and with equivocal feelings. He felt that he could not realistically refuse to greet Ezekiel, as 'if I had not forgiven him, it would only be a matter of time'. In other words, there is no neat resolution, as part of the reason Pierre gives for forgiving Ezekiel is that he is still afraid of him. In this way, the film pulls back from a top-down version of *national* unity and reconciliation to expose and express the immense difficulties at the level of everyday life. 'I try not to get involved with them', Pierre says. 'I know that if I confront them, they will kill me within a heartbeat ... I tread lightly' which, if not necessarily representative, can be seen as symptomatic of everyday levels of fear and distrust.

In the concluding section of the film, Samantha Power takes up an issue which, in some ways, the documentary has tried to enact in its form and style: 'can there be a version of this history that can appear in a Rwandan textbook?' – 'A history that most citizens could agree upon?' Power raises a very pertinent point, which cuts across the survivor/perpetrator discourse, related to Hutu who might feel that their suffering (thousands were killed in the genocide and its aftermath, while some sheltered Tutsi) has been denied by the 'Tutsi' government – can they feel acknowledged and human and not dehumanised in similar ways the Tutsi were prior to, and during, the genocide? This is a crucial matter for reconciliation and addresses what many critics have seen as a contradiction between RPF discourse and the actual practices of, it has been claimed, a Tutsi 'ethnocracy' which closed down political space and stifled dissent, and which in its NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) self-assessment peer review process (January 2005) was less than frank – complacent even – in its evaluation of its political governance, according to an analysis by Eduard Jordaan, of the Department of Political Science at the University of Stellenbosch (Joordan, 2006).⁷

The film attempts a comprehensive coverage of the background to the genocide (although it takes little account of post-independence scholarship), makes use of archival footage of the killings, and tries to move between a national and a personal perspective. Memorial sites, formal and informal, are visited, and the scale of the genocide and its aftermath is evidenced by the frequent use of numbers and the complicity and neglect of the international community – including the still-dubious nature of Operation Turquoise – made clear through archive and interview. The film does acknowledge that brutalities were committed by both sides, but it fails to offer any real analysis of power prior to genocide in terms either of regional divisions or along class lines. Implicitly, it endorses an ‘ethnic’ reading of power and by so doing gives sustenance to the RPF narrative of creating a nation simply of Rwandans, whereas, it has been argued, a case could be made for claiming that ‘the absence of ethnic identities has become a means of masking the monopoly by Tutsi military and political power’ (Reyntjens, 2004).

Unlike the previous two films discussed, Eric Kabera’s *Keepers of Memory* (there is also a French dubbed version, *Gardiens de la mémoire*, 2004) eschews voiceover narration and the use of experts. It takes its authority from the voices of the people interviewed – survivors of the genocide who through rituals of mourning and the maintenance of memorial sites seek to give memory a future. The personal nature of testimony and the absence of obtrusive mediation allow the viewer to identify with particular individuals and their stories, and opens up space for responses not determined by outside observers or professional spokespeople. The survivors are not explained or patronised but located at different sites in a way which empowers them. It is their experience which gives the project its focus and shapes the form and style of presentation, allowing at one point a reflective process to unsettle/ interrogate the presentation. The film works through what I call an aesthetic of ethical respect, compassionate but never sentimental, rarely striving for effect or to prescribe a response. Any advocacy is left to the testimonies themselves which produce their own impact without being abbreviated or summarised by a controlling narrator. The testimonies are dubbed into English but the voices/accents are Rwandan. A range of sites are filmed to avoid any sense of a simplifying homogeneity and to lend nuance and diversity to the communities visited and to the complexities of the lived experience.

To adapt Liisa Malkki’s words, the documentary does not give us ‘speechless emissaries’, silenced survivors in need of captions and expert testimony to speak of them and for them (Malkki, 1996). Perhaps the fact that the director, Kabera, is a Rwandan who lost family in the genocide has shaped the decisions and choices about this mode of production. The director’s commentary on the DVD version indicates how emotional

the filming experience was, but the actual production refrains from any exploitative use of emotion, allowing visual and verbal representations to convey their own effect. Similarly, although there are frequent images of cadavers, bones and skulls, there is no gratuitous use of archival footage of mutilation and close-ups of killings.

The film has an effective opening sequence which helps to focus the film as a whole, with people moving in silence and darkness, with a muted music soundtrack, towards the Nyanze Memorial Site for over 5000 people. Two brief captions situate the genocide, and these are followed by shots of the beautiful Rwandan landscape as a reminder that the country is not only about genocide. There are images of hills and rivers and a long pan along the river which takes us to the opening titles. It emerges that the moment of narrative is the 11 April annual commemoration and there is an intercutting of the graves with the cries of one particular woman, Beate, heavily scarred, who speaks of her losses in 1994. The subdued filming, the dubbing which gives a sense of immediacy but does not try to reproduce the non-verbal signs of distress, and the formal positioning of graves, crosses and memorial stones all give the scene a gravity, with the camera a co-presence rather than an outsider looking in. Throughout the film, there is this effect of *co-presence* which gives a non-instrumental dignity to the documentary, an anchorage for viewer and the represented. Beauty, horror and trauma co-exist organically without any insistent narration formulating this for us.

Beata Iribagiza, one of the driving forces of the film, the first of a chain of memory keepers who bring the past into the present, speaks of her drinking the blood of slain relatives in order to survive – an almost sacramental moment which is not sensationalised. Her interview is intercut with footage of *interahamwe* training and of roadblocks, film shot earlier in 1994 by Kabera's co-producer, Nick Hughes. Together they made the first feature film on the genocide, *100 Days* (1999), which uses the same restraint and respect as the documentary.

There are no studio interviews, as each testimony is given from a specific site, including those where traces of the dead – hair, for example – still remain. We are shown pit latrines where bodies were thrown, hear people speak in a dignified fashion of loss, and watch survivors searching through remains wearing protective gloves. People standing, sitting, mourning, crying at the memorial site are allowed to represent themselves, with death evidently present in the bodies of many of the survivors.

Another site focused upon is the Genocide Memorial at Gisoza (a national memorial) where bodies are still being exhumed, re-burials are taking place, and a larger number – it is a site for 250,000 – are placed in open graves. At the point of filming the memorial is seen as still under construction. The sites seem implicitly to have a double function, as

an *aide-mémoire* for Rwandans and as a witness to the outside world. Although the figure of 800,000 is repeated throughout all the films like a mantra, the close-up testimonies remind us of the 'one-by-one' experiences of the slaughter: 'the terrible reality of those who lived through it'.

I say this by way of stressing the need to challenge the 'normative modalities of narrating the Rwandan genocide' which, as Heike Härting in a seminal essay argues, rely on and produce *necropoeia* – 'an infusion of social, physical, or political death to negate rather than construct the African subject' (Härting, 2008: 64). What Härting refers to as the mediating and stereotyping of Africa, 'the spectacle of the dead African body that serves as a historically and rhetorically continuous signifier' produces the 'simultaneous over-determination and representational reductionism through which particular African subjectivities are rendered abject' (2008: 61).

The constant showing of streets littered with corpses as one of the iconic signifiers of the genocide in Western representations is deeply problematic and mostly gratuitous. *Keepers of Memory* does use archival footage of people being killed – one scene in particular of a woman killed by a machete filmed by Nick Hughes – but it is demonstrative in the sense that these scenes – shown from a distance – are intercut with images of French nationals being evacuated, of UN vehicles sent to transport Western citizens, and of Clinton speaking in Kigali and finally acknowledging the genocide. A shot of Kevin Spacey, who accompanied Clinton, confirms the subjectivity of the Western celebrity caught in a humanitarian pose. Viewers are left to draw their own conclusion from these juxtapositions.

What *Keepers of Memory* tries to achieve is a measure of autonomy and subjectivity for the Rwandans in the film. The wisdom of displaying cadavers is still a matter of debate but, apparently, survivors wish to preserve skulls, bones and items of clothing in their original state, in the same way that some of them are also keen not to conceal their scars – traces of beatings which have taken on a symbolic resonance. Many of the keepers bear such scars as self-chosen continuing signifiers for the same reason as they wish to leave sites 'unsanitised' by official memorial processes. Rather than the 'living dead' they manifest the 'dead living'.

In the film, representations of 'keepers' are intercut with images of, and interviews with, genocide perpetrators. One particular sequence juxtaposes shots of Emmanuel, keeper of the Murambi site, speaking of the 27,000 buried there, with those of a convicted murderer and former *interahamwe* talking graphically straight to camera of his killing of nine people, and asking forgiveness of God, the Rwandan government and the Rwandan people. Whether he saw this as an opportunity on camera to mitigate the effects of his crimes is uncertain, but the segment gains its saliency by being intercut with Emmanuel's recollections, not of generalised killings

but of specific deaths – the ‘one-by-one’ mentioned earlier. This moment rescues the corpses from the abjection, not just of Western representation, but of Hutu Power intention – dehumanisation.

A number of the sites are former churches preserved in their ruined state to remind us both of the ways in which the concept of sanctuary was violated, and how, in some instances, the people were let down by priests in collusion with the *génocidaires*. The level of impoverishment and ill-health among some of the keepers is a reminder of the wider legacy of the genocide and the enormous task of reconstruction at all levels. By contrast, the film also focuses on scenes of children playing, of an ex-RPA soldier, now a singer, shown in concert in vibrant surroundings with a positive message, and of people trying to make sense of what happened.

Mostly the keepers show observers around in a fairly dispassionate manner, but one sequence focuses on Veneranda, the sole keeper of the Nyarubuye Memorial who is obviously still traumatised. She is shown initially tending bones and skulls neatly laid out in ordered rows, and speaks of the massacre orchestrated by the former burgomaster. As she lays flowers on the bones she calls on God to punish the perpetrators as on her own she can do nothing, but she also prays for those who committed the horrible acts. She tries to be self-controlled but is overcome with tears and the camera follows her as she moves in trance-like bewilderment and distress beating the bones with a flower. Intercut with her grieving and attempts to fight her trauma is the only instance in the film of the use of an expert authority – a psychologist, Albert Nambaje – who tries to offer a professional analysis of the ‘precarious nation’ and its need to struggle with its violent trauma, to withdraw and go through it on their own terms.

Shots of grave construction, survivor testimony and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda at Arusha where men in suits appear on charges of genocide, are cut together – the continuum again indicating the complexities of reconciliation, as each alleged perpetrator, a leading figure in the genocide, denies all charges and maintains their lies.

One brief sequence is based on a *gacaca* hearing where the difficulties of this process are highlighted by a survivor who saw the alleged killer of his family but could not speak to him. He speaks frankly of his resentment but did not take revenge as, he says, it is forbidden. This reminds us that ‘nation-building discourses on reconciliation often subordinate individual needs, and that truth commissions and individual processes of healing work on different time lines’, and that, as Hamber and Wilson argue, ‘retribution may be just as effective as reconciliation at creating symbolic closure’ (Hamber and Wilson, 2002: 35). Again, the complex and precarious compromises which are handed down from above, and which people sometimes feel under duress to accept, are underlined.

One of the final moments in the film is also an instance of reflexivity, as the processes of representation are unsettled. On a visit to the Bissero monument, a site of resistance where *genocidaires* were fought with spears and stones, Gakoko, a survivor, speaks of the more than 50,000 who died, including 22 in his own family. At one stage, he turns to the camera and directly addresses his interviewers:

I have the impression you are journalists ... you come and ask us questions and then you go back ... many of us are dying ... why do you ask all these questions ... the way I see it, you are not of any help to us ... when will you come to be of help ... can you not see how old we are ... do you want to wait until it is too late?

While not exactly deconstructing the whole filmic undertaking, these questions do reveal the gulf between the sophisticated, urban professional carrying out symbolic and cultural work, and the impoverished, rural survivor with very clear material needs. Kabera realises this and claims that the whole *raison d'être* of the project is to interrogate their own practices as film makers, to make sense of the Rwandan experience.

Originally called 'Keepers of the Dead', *Keepers of Memory: Survivors' Accounts of the Rwandan Genocide* is much more than the sub-title would suggest. It is a film about memory-making, about memorials, but, as Bill Nichols says, 'the pressure of the past on the present moment of recounting ... can become as much a subject of the story told as the history ostensibly recounted' (quoted in Ward, 2005: 52). By exploring the ways in which survivors live in and through their memories, and publicly maintain those memories for others, Kabera has made this process as much the subject of the story told as the stories the survivors tell. The film itself becomes a memorial about memory making.

Inevitably, the film has a specific generational inflection as most of the survivors were/are mothers, fathers, wives and husbands. In a film which Kabera produced later, *Through My Eyes*, the perspective shifts to other voices, other lives – those of young people with little or no direct memory, less under the pressure of the past and able to question and challenge the 'official' memory and even the RPF narrative in some respects.

For all the policies of the government designed to bring about reconciliation, including civic education programmes and awareness-raising strategies, in the absence of long-term structures for reconciliation, such as transparent democratic processes combined with financial and material investment in impoverished communities, the rhetoric will trail behind the lived reality of people's lives marked by fear and insecurity. If the *national* process of reconciliation, as National Unity and Reconciliation Commission representative Alphonse Bakusi claims, is 'about leaving behind one's own psychology, one's own history, and coming together under an umbrella of national cohesion' (quoted in Webley, n.d.: 41),

then this cannot be achieved by symbolic means alone, or by ideological manipulation, but by the reorganisation of power structures along democratic lines, by addressing deep social and economic inequalities, and by substantial material investment at all levels which impact upon that 'psychology' and that 'history'.

In their different ways, each of the cultural representations focused upon has sought to articulate and bring into sound, presence and visibility spaces of silence, absence and unrepresentability. Some, as has been argued, come close, consciously or not, to working within the discourses of reconciliation fostered by the so-called RPF narrative, others challenge whether a nation as such can ever produce reconciliation beyond the level of rhetoric and instead focus on the local, the particular and the people themselves resisting in some ways the dominant models of conciliation offered and trying to carve out some kind of space for diversity and difference, remembrance and forgetting, loss and renewal.

Notes

1. The following documentary films were consulted for the purposes of this article but limitations of space have only allowed detailed treatment of a small sample of these: *Flores De Ruanda* (dir: David Muñoz, 2008); *Gacaca: Living Together Again in Rwanda?* (dir: Anne Aghion, 2002); *God Sleeps in Rwanda* (dir: Kimberle Acquaro and Stacy Sherman, 2004); *In Rwanda We Say ... The Family that Does Not Speak Dies* (dir: Anne Aghion, 2004); *In the Tall Grass* (dir: J. Coll Metcalfe, 2006); *Gardiens de la mémoire* (dir: Eric Kabera, 2004); *Keepers of Memory: Survivors' Accounts of the Rwandan Genocide* (dir: Eric Kabera, 2005); *Rwanda: Living Forgiveness* (dir: Ralf Springhorn, 2005); *Rwanda: Do Scars Ever Fade?* (dir: Paul Freedman, 2004); *The Diary of Immaculée* (dir: Peter LeDonne, 2006); *Through My Eyes: A Film About Rwandan Youth* (dir: Kavila Matu, 2006)
2. For a discussion of the Kibeho massacre and the RPF involvement, see Lemarchand (1998).
3. Eugenia Zorbas cites figures from a survey carried out by Gakusi and Mouzer in April/May 2002 which show the disproportionately large presence of Tutsi (approximately 15 per cent of Rwanda's population), especially Tutsi returnees from the diaspora, in the senior levels of the political, economic and military power structures of Rwanda (Zorbas, 2004: 44–5).
4. A recent report for the Crisis States Research Centre of the LSE by Frederick Golooba-Mutebi offers a very positive appraisal of 'the efforts and achievements made by the new ruling elites in pursuit of long-term peace and stability' and argues that the RPF has transcended 'the politics of ethnic and regional exclusion in all spheres of public life' (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008: 1, 35), but he is unconvincing in his refutation of trenchant criticisms by Reyntjens (see note 5), Strauss and others; nor is the Gakusi and Mouzer survey mentioned.
5. Filip Reyntjens argues that Rwanda 'is experiencing not democracy and reconciliation but dictatorship and exclusion' (Reyntjens, 2004: 177), and that the RPF, while achieving a measure of sound infrastructural reconstruction and relatively good governance, has

- practised ethnic discrimination – along the lines indicated by the Gakusi and Mouzer survey – suppressed dissent, and produced levels of structural violence, including human rights abuses, which have weakened the democratic process and severely damaged civil society.
6. The fullest treatment of the *gacaca* process as a model of transitional justice, with its locally elected officials – known as *inyangamugayo* – and categories of offences, can be found in Harrell (2003).
 7. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a peer review process on the state of economic, political, social and corporate governance of a particular country.

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