

Cosmopolitan and Nationalist Discourses of Reconciliation: Memory (Re)construction in South

Africa and Rwanda

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Author Note

In this paper, I offer a comparative analysis of reconciliation discourses in South Africa and Rwanda. My analysis is based on 28 interviews with South African survivors of human rights crimes under apartheid and 12 interviews with Rwandan genocide survivors and perpetrators. These interviews were conducted in the summers of 2015 and 2016, with the generous support of the Duke Human Rights Center, the Dean's Summer Fellowship, and the Humanities Writ Large Program. This paper represents a condensed version of a chapter from my senior thesis in political theory, which attempts to posit an alternative framework of transitional justice.

## **Introduction**

In the past several decades, the proliferation of truth commissions in African and South American states following political transitions has ignited academic and policy interest in restorative justice mechanisms. A post-Cold War neologism, “restorative” justice encapsulates a multiplicity of approaches to post-conflict or transitional justice that include truth commissions, victim-offender mediation, and grassroots conferences (Teitel 2003). These institutions and mechanisms have generally been held in contradistinction to the retributive model established as precedent at Nuremberg (Llewellyn & Howse 1999, Popovski 2000). Much of the current literature on restorative justice, however, is concerned with truth commissions, often neglecting the local, historiographical, and discursive processes that underlie institutional proceedings. In light of this lacuna in transitional justice scholarship, this study focuses specifically on the discursive dimensions of reconciliation. Here, I examine the dynamics between state-imposed narratives of reconciliation and community-level efforts to rebuild relationships. I offer a comparative case study of reconciliation discourses in post-transition South Africa and Rwanda, examining the differences in local response between two respective sets of interviews through a Foucauldian lens. These interviews show that while some differences in community-level reconciliation between the two cases may be attributed to ideological discourse, the overwhelming preoccupation of both South African and Rwandan participants with concrete associations points to the potential limits of top-down reconciliation narratives.

Over the summers of 2015 and 2016, I interviewed 28 survivors of apartheid-era violations in Cape Town, South Africa, most of whom had been actively involved in the liberation movement. The interviews showed a broad range of perspectives on the reconciliation process, with distinct variations across occupational, socioeconomic, and spatial demographics.

Seven of the interviews were with ex-militants, most residents of Bonteheuwel, an historically coloured township in the Cape Town municipality; six, with leaders in civil society groups; and seven, with members of labor organizations under the umbrella of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Other interview participants included domestic workers, homemakers, educators, and community activists. In general, interviewees who resided in poorer areas, were unemployed, and/or witnessed minimal changes to their social and economic standing after the end of apartheid were more likely to view the reconciliation process negatively. The single ubiquitous issue that emerged in all the interviews was economic inequality. All 28 interview participants with whom I spoke were overwhelmingly concerned with South Africa's current disparities in wealth, income, and service provisions across racial-geographic lines. Such unanimous concern suggests that socioeconomic issues may pose a prominent, if hitherto neglected, obstacle to long-term reconciliation in South Africa.

In the summer of 2016, I also spoke with 12 genocide survivors and perpetrators in Rwanda. These interviews were evenly split between well-educated students and professionals in Kigali and less-educated residents of a rural farming community near the city. There was a subtle but unmistakable attitudinal difference between urban and rural interviewees: the former were generally more inclined to be openly critical of the reconciliation process, while the latter invariably remained within the parameters set by Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)-sanctioned political discourse. At the same time, even those who were critical formulated their responses in highly overt terms. This in itself is unsurprising, given the restrictive political climate of Rwanda (Mgbako 2005, Reyntjens 2011). My interviews were conducted under a number of sociopolitical and legal constraints: notably, Rwanda's speech laws prohibiting the propagation of "genocide ideology" and incitement to "divisionism" (Buckley-Zistel 2006, Zorbas 2004).

Due to the discursive constraints and the small sample size, I have supplemented my interviews with several studies from the rich secondary literature on Rwanda. These studies, combined with my own, point to the presence of lingering tensions in Rwanda, which the national-unity discourse of the RPF regime may have obfuscated rather than resolved.

Overall, there were notable distinctions between the ways in which South African and Rwandan participants chose to utilize state-reinforced narratives of reconciliation. Interview participants from Rwanda were careful to adopt the RFP regime's nationalist discourse as a means of demonstrating their political compliance. South African interviewees, on the other hand, often used the terms and slogans of reconciliation with irony, thus co-opting the African National Congress (ANC)'s cosmopolitan discourse into their own critiques. Both sets of interview participants tended to transpose highly abstract, ideological concepts into concrete cases and examples with respect to local relations. This concretizing impulse on the part of both South African and Rwandan interviewees suggests that the most salient concerns, namely those pertaining to local community relations, often belie or transcend the ideological frameworks embodied in national reconciliation discourses. Hence, regardless of whether these discourses are used as political critique or cover in the transitional process, they are almost invariably exceeded by the more immediate project of reconstituting social bonds. My study ultimately points to a gap between the historico-ideological process of memory (re)construction for the nation-state and the concrete practice of community-building at the local level: if the former may be regarded as mythmaking process of self-reinvention, only the latter can provide the substantive and long-term foundations for the historical mythology at the heart of the inchoate nation.

### **Cosmopolitan and Nationalist Discourses: Memory as Power**

The term “re-conciliation” itself presupposes an antecedent harmony, a nostalgic past. Reconciliation invokes return: but to what? As Ruti Teitel observes, post-transition societies are burdened with the unique responsibility of answering this question—of self-consciously inventing their own origins, so to speak (2002). Transitional justice entails historical (re)production, whereby the incoming sociopolitical order establishes a new narrative about the collective past that, in turn, conditions and extends into the shared future (Bell 2008). On these grounds, reconciliation and historical construction may be regarded as inseparable: the former presupposes a particular historical narrative of pre-conflict unity, while the latter substantiates the reconciliatory and nation-building goals of the inchoate state (Bell 2003, Wilson 1996). It follows that reconciliation discourse and practice cannot be divorced from the ideologico-political foundations of the post-transition order, insofar as these are mutually implicated and reinforcing. In this section, the conceptual nexus between discourse and politics serves as a framework for exploring the ideological underpinnings of reconciliation narratives in South Africa and Rwanda: here, I use a discursive analysis of speech transcripts to show that South African and Rwandan narratives of reconciliation are grounded respectively in liberal-cosmopolitan and nationalist systems of thought.

From a Foucauldian perspective, discourses of truth are predicated on relations of power (Foucault 1976). Through this conceptual lens, reconciliation narratives may be regarded as a type of truth discourse, which configures the values and normative behaviors of ethical response to transition on the basis of a particular historical construction (Andrews 2003). This foundational account of the past—and in turn, the discourse of reconciliation that it produces—presupposes consensus within the given society, to the extent that it suggests the preexistence of

intersubjective cultural and historical memories (Irwin-Zarecka 1994). It follows that monolithic narratives of reconciliation and the historical past may serve an implicitly coercive function where consensus is lacking—namely, in fractured or transitional societies (Eze 2015). In these contexts, reconciliation mechanisms, such as truth commissions, promulgate a singular “grand narrative” of the past as a means of suppressing counter-memories while reinforcing the state’s self-chosen mythology of origins (Andrews 2003, Foucault 1978). This post-transition matrix of national myths and narrative identities constitutes the ethico-ideological framework in which certain attitudes and affective responses toward reconciliation are narratively configured as virtuous, and others, as reprehensible. Reconciliation narrative thus becomes a *dispositif* of the state (Foucault 1976): the discursive handmaiden of politics and in turn, politically-constructed memory.

In the case of South Africa’s democratic transition, the reconciliation discourse adopted by the TRC and the ANC government evokes the new regime’s liberal-cosmopolitan underpinnings (Eze 2015, Gross 2004, Moodley & Adam 2000). Cosmopolitanism, according to Martha Nussbaum, is characterized by an ethos of fundamental openness to others (1994). The cosmopolitan’s primary allegiance is to “the worldwide community of human beings,” from which the most essential moral duties originate. Cosmopolitan ideology shares certain elements with the traditionally African ethic of *Ubuntu*, or “humanity toward others,” such that the latter has been referred to as an “indigenous cosmopolitanism” (Mittelman 2005). Although the concept of *Ubuntu* has been expressly popularized through the TRC, I direct my attention here primarily to cosmopolitan ideology in view of its affinities to political liberalism (Ingram 2003). These theoretical linkages may prove useful to the purposes of this analysis, insofar as they potentially allow for a more considered inquiry into the relation between South Africa’s liberal-

democratic system and its reconciliation narratives. In the context of cosmopolitan thought, the return implicit in “reconciliation” may be construed in terms of restoring the wholeness of moral relations based on universal humanity. The past that it presupposes is a “prelapsarian” state of harmony between individual subjects (Moon 2004). As Claire Moon writes, reconciliation “performs in order to suggest that a condition of national harmony and accord in South Africa actually *did* exist prior to its alleged ‘rupture.’”

The notion of this implied past—or myth of origin, as it were—can be identified in Nelson Mandela’s opening address to the South African parliament in the Special Debate on the TRC final report (Mandela 1999). In his speech, Mandela implicitly appeals to a concept of shared humanity as a prelapsarian condition shattered by apartheid: “no other finding,” he asserts, “was possible upon a system which sought to deny us all our common humanity and to divide us from another and set us against each other.” Allusions to “[tearing]” and “division,” to rupture, punctuate the speech, evoking a former wholeness prior to the introduction of apartheid. Notably, he describes reconciliation in explicitly liberal-democratic terms, thereby highlighting the political valence of the cosmopolitan vision delineated:

“As we reached out across the divisions of centuries to establish democracy, we need now to work together in all our diversity, including the diversity of our experience and recollection of our history, to overcome the divisions themselves and eradicate their consequences. Reconciliation...is inseparable from the achievement of a non-racial, democratic and united nation affording common citizenship, rights and obligations to each and every person, and respecting the rich diversity of our people.”

Here, Mandela acknowledges the pluralistic character of South African society. The positive valence of the term “diversity,” which is repeated several times in this segment, contrasts with the negative connotations of earlier references to division. Diversity, now of “experience” rather than of race, is celebrated as indispensable to the reconciliation process. Difference and unity are commensurable, to the extent that reconciliation occurs on the basis of “common citizenship” rather than substantive racial, ethnic, or religious commonalities. Citizenship, as a hallmark of the liberal-democratic state, thus becomes configured as the central measure and motif of sociopolitical unity (Kalyvas 2005). In this regard, cosmopolitanism and liberal citizenship can be seen as mirroring registers of a constructed unity, whereby the former provides ethico-ideological grounds for the latter’s “imagined community” of liberal-democratic citizens (Anderson 2006).

Whereas South Africa’s reconciliation narratives uphold a cosmopolitan vision of the post-transitional society, Rwanda’s reconciliation discourse, with its emphasis on “national unity,” presupposes a “thicker” or more substantive conception of social commonality based on shared history. As Christiane Adamczyk observes, Rwanda’s reconciliation and nation-building process emphasizes the shared language, territory, and history of the Banyarwanda as means of generating national identity (2011). Citizenship is based on “Rwandanness,” which in turn, is predicated on a particular historical account of precolonial belonging and unity (Buckley-Zistel 2006). The RPF’s discursive emphasis on Rwandan national identity is further accentuated and bolstered by ascribing responsibility for the genocide to external forces (Ibreck 2012, Reyntjens 2004). In a speech commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Rwandan independence, President Paul Kagame excoriated his Western critics for contributing to Rwanda’s plight (Kagame 2012):



“We are also conscious that along the way, external factors have adversely interfered in Africa’s governance, often supporting lack of accountability in governance and hence promoting illegitimate interests. For many years, our people were told and made to believe lies and myths manufactured from within and outside, distorting everything about who we were, who we should be, and what we should do for the healthy development of Africa, and specifically Rwanda.”

Here, Kagame seems to be hinting at the presence of an ominous “third force” responsible for both the genocide and Rwanda’s present economic and political dilemmas. In invoking “lies and myths manufactured from within and without,” Kagame effectively shifts blame for Rwanda’s painful history onto external interference and internal collaborators. This conspiratorial spin on events affirms Rwandan nationalism by casting foreign nations and international agencies as the culprits in an “us-against-them” rendition of the country’s history. In this respect, the RPF’s national reconciliation discourse has merely readjusted the parameters of social, political, and cultural identification in Rwanda (Buckley-Zistel 2006, Newbury 1998). Now, the relevant category of belonging is no longer ethnicity, but national identity—the Tutsi, no longer the “Other,” insofar as their function has been superseded by external parties within nation-building discourse.

Given the dependence of Rwanda’s reconciliation discourse on the RPF’s particular account of the past, historical construction remains a deeply contested matter. The RPF government ascribes blame for the genocide to Belgian colonialism, which it deems responsible for “dividing” Hutu and Tutsi (Straus 2014). Although this account is true to a certain extent, it

nonetheless represents a reductive version of historical events, which as some scholars have suggested, precludes more thoughtful engagement with the past (Buckley-Zistel 2006, Purdekova 2008, Zorbas 2004). The RPF's official account of history opposes the so-called "Hamitic hypothesis" central to genocide ideology. According to the Hamitic-hypothesis version of history, the Tutsi constitute an alien group that emigrated to present-day Rwanda from the horn of Africa. Neither the RPF nor the Hamitic-hypothesis account of Rwandan history is fully satisfactory (Uvin 1997). While the Hamitic hypothesis fatally misrepresents the Hutu and Tutsi as separate races, the RPF's account depicting an idyllic precolonial "oneness" of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa consciously overlooks the presence of warring kingdoms in Rwanda prior to Belgian occupation (Jefremovas 1997, Smith 1995). Such propagandistic distortion of Rwandan history has led some academics and human rights organizations to accuse the RPF of historical revisionism (Clark & Kaufmann 2009).

The RPF's attempt to monopolize historical and reconciliation narrative represents a particularly perspicuous example of the Foucauldian relation between power and discourse. In post-genocide Rwanda's highly charged social and political environment, the stakes of suppressing counter-memories are especially high (Weldon 2009). It follows that whereas South Africa's cosmopolitan framework of reconciliation may omit or fail to provide certain discursive spaces for historico-political contestation, Rwanda's national unity discourse actively and expressly seeks to suppress alternative memories and historical accounts (Barchiesi 1999, Weldon 2009). Furthermore, if South African cosmopolitanism posits universal humanity as the grounds of belonging, Rwandan nationalism depends on the constant constitution and reconstitution of an "Other." South Africa and Rwanda's discourses of reconciliation may in this regard be seen as respectively embodying inclusive and exclusive mythologies of origin (Gross

2004). In the following sections, I contend that both these historico-ideological constructs may have a repressive impact on certain forms of remembrance and in turn, subaltern contestations of the state's "grand narrative."

### **Contesting "Rainbowism": Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa**

South Africa's reconciliation process, though touted as a success by scholars and human rights organizations in its earlier years, has faced growing criticism in recent years for failing to address the economic and systemic vestiges of apartheid (Arbour 2007, Miller 2008, Terreblanche 2002). My interviews with Cape Town residents in 2015 and 2016 show a significant degree of skepticism and disillusionment toward the discourse and ideals of national reconciliation. Though most interviewees conceded that amnesty and the TRC proceedings were "good" in an abstract or conceptual sense, many of them revealed altogether different feelings about reconciliation in their personal narratives. This apparent ambivalence toward reconciliation suggests that social, political, and discursive pressures can result in self-censorship, where survivors of human rights crimes may feel compelled to forgive in compliance with the moral narrative of reconciliation (Osiel 1999, Wilson 1996). In the meantime, survivors may direct resentments from traumatic memories, financial difficulties, and social frustrations toward perceived "Others." The following discursive analysis of 28 interviews uncovers the ways in which the "inclusive" paradigm of cosmopolitanism can potentially suppress public confrontation with enduring socioeconomic inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa.

*The Economic (In)Justice of Rainbowism*

Across the board, there was a strong sense that some people had gotten away with the spoils of apartheid. Former activists, ex-militants, and low-income township residents, in particular, were most inclined to vocalize strong negative views of the reconciliation process. A number of interviewees expressed feelings of having been “deceived” or “robbed” by the TRC, though nearly everyone with whom I spoke affirmed the need for reconciliation on principle. According to Farah,<sup>1</sup> a former activist in the liberation movement, South African whites had been “left off the hook”:

“People were magnanimous in forgiveness...in embracing a new South Africa. The first five years of just nation building, you know. That there’s a place for all of us. You see what happened after 1994, when the economic opportunities opened up, the people who benefited most from them were the people who had money. And so the whites had most of the money, still have most of the money and resources, became even richer. Which means that life actually became better, and you were not asked to in any way contribute to repairing a relationship that was broken. You were just embraced. Rainbow nation, la la la.”

Farah suggests in this segment from our interview that economic forms of redress were subsumed under the political project of nation-building and reconciliation. Hence, she refers to the “rainbow nation”—the South African motif of cosmopolitan diversity—in a cynical sense, thereby implying that the concept may in some ways be responsible for the lack of restitution. As Farah observes, this injury is further amplified by various forms of economic self-

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<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed to protect the privacy of interview participants.

aggrandizement on the part of apartheid's perpetrators and beneficiaries—white profiteering off the tourism industry, for instance, which was enabled by the end of apartheid as a political institution, if not as an economic system. The problem Farah identifies here is unconditional forgiveness. The “rainbow nation” ideal, she implies, can only remain an empty slogan without substantive social and economic reforms.

Like Farah, most interviewees invoked the rainbow nation either cynically or superficially. Those who brought up the phrase in a perfunctory fashion seemed to do so out of concern for moral or social compliance with reconciliation norms, insofar as many would later express lingering feelings of distrust or anger toward certain groups in society. In this respect, the interviews exhibit a prominent gap between reconciliation as an abstract commitment and reconciliation in practice. Such a distinction between the cosmopolitan abstraction of “Rainbowism” and the realities associated with rebuilding communities emerged prominently in my interviews with ex-militants. All of the ex-militants with whom I spoke had returned to their respective communities after liberation, living more or less under the same circumstances in which they had grown up. Many, furthermore, were unemployed or in financial straits. The seemingly contradictory idea that the TRC was a positive development—but at the same time, there should have been prosecutions, confiscations of property—surfaced in a number of my interviews. Abdul, an ex-militant whom I interviewed on three separate occasions, in fact asserted that prosecutions were still in order. A former member of the Bonteheuwel Military Wing (BMW), Abdul had nearly three hundred charges against him when he agreed to testify before the TRC. The TRC, he said, had “tricked” him into divulging information about his activities and failed to follow through with its promises. When asked explicitly about the value of reconciliation, however, he acknowledged that “reconciliation was a good thing,” and in turn,

that the TRC itself was “good.” Abdul’s somewhat half-hearted affirmation of the reconciliation process here nevertheless stands in stark contrast to his furious denunciations of perpetrators, whites, and the TRC that would follow later in our conversations.

For Abdul, the term “rainbow nation” entails forgiveness and forgiveness is impossible. Whereas his avowed commitment to the reconciliation process evidently arose from a sense of obligation, Abdul’s professed inability to forgive came across as more authentic, to the extent that it seemed to emanate from a deep sense of having gone unrecognized. Abdul’s retrospective view of the TRC is undoubtedly colored by the advantages he anticipated, and in turn, likely did not receive. It is evident from the interview that he and his brother Chris went to the TRC with certain legal and economic benefits in mind, or as Chris put it, to “highlight their needs.” Both Abdul and Chris have made it clear that these needs were unmet: Chris is presently unemployed, while Abdul has yet to receive a force number for medical care. For Abdul, Chris, and many other ex-militants with whom I spoke, economic restitution precedes reconciliation. According to Conrad, an ex-militant formerly part of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), reconciliation in the abstract is meaningless without financial compensation, which itself constitutes a form of apology and affirmation. Reparations and other forms of economic redress can thus be seen as the precondition for forgiveness, rather than what forgiveness is intended to substitute or render unnecessary. In Abdul’s own words: “Up till today, I still don’t believe in the idea of a rainbow nation, because what a rainbow nation means is that for all the perpetrators, we’re going to forgive them and everything will be happy. We are not happy, we are not happy.” Abdul thereby repudiates the facile connection between forgiveness and “happiness”—as it were, the peace or spiritual fulfillment that forgiveness putatively entails. He implicitly posits a view of “happiness”

that deviates from the unconditional, and therein specious, view of forgiveness embodied in Rainbowist discourse—highlighting, instead, the material preconditions of reconciliation.

*Scapegoating the “Other” in Post-Apartheid South Africa*

Most of the people with whom I spoke, to varying degrees, expressed feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration toward their economic condition. What varied across interviews, however, was to whom they chose to assign blame. Those who were politically active or involved in civil society organizations generally attributed responsibility for economic injustices to a broad spectrum of groups: the ANC-led government, businesses, the new black elite, the white population, and so on forth. On the other hand, residents of townships who were less active in organizing or politics tended to hold corrupt low-level officials or other demographics of South African society responsible. According to Maria, a “coloured” textile worker, the apartheid that currently persists in South Africa is “not so much between the whites and the blacks” as “between the blacks and the coloureds.” Referring back to our group interview earlier in the week, she noted that there had been a distance between the coloured participants and Priscilla, the only black African in the group, apparently due to the latter’s excessive outspokenness. “Before, it was the white domination above us, now it’s the blacks,” Maria said, and continued by recounting several anecdotes of black discrimination against coloureds.

Later in the interview, however, Maria transitioned from the particular to the general, from the “I” to the “we,” and her attitude changed markedly. She conceded, at this point, that coloured discrimination against blacks has been perpetuated in her own township. This, she attributed to a lack of *Ubuntu* or “brother feeling” on the part of both blacks and coloureds: “We

make our own apartheid among us, while Mandela makes it clear. If we learn to accept that that is my brother from another mother, then there will be harmony. Then you can say, there is no apartheid, there are no divisions, nothing.” Here, Maria appears to be invoking the cosmopolitan or “Rainbowist” ideal in her view of interracial conciliation. The tonal difference between Maria’s response to particular instances, such as the group dialogue with Priscilla, and her engagement with the general fact of interracial divisions is striking. Her attitude toward particular Africans is generally unfavorable, but at the same time, she seems to genuinely support the cosmopolitan ethos promulgated by leaders like Mandela. This apparent contradiction reflects the gap between lived and conceived reconciliation previously discussed.

My conversation with Maria served as a segue into subsequent interviews with the residents of Bonteheuwel, who in general, held acutely unfavorable views of reconciliation. The current situation of Delilah, a former ANC activist, can be taken as a representative example of the plight that many Bonteheuwel residents now face. Delilah, who was in her late teens by the end of apartheid, had been deeply involved in the liberation movement—verbatim, in “running around and throwing stones.” Her first election in 1994, she described as a “celebration,” a “party”: “It was like getting a present, like a girl getting a doll,” she recounted. Presently, she takes care of her elderly mother and the child of her brother who is unemployed. She is no longer politically involved and harbors a strong distrust of the ANC. In Delilah’s view, the coloureds are “always in the middle,” a phrase she reiterated several times throughout my interview with her. It is of no consequence to Delilah which political party ascends in each election, for in her words, “if the black man wins, the black man gets privileges. If the white man wins, the whites get privileges.” Programs like Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), she dismissed as “just an excuse” to keep coloureds down. Her views on immigration are even more pronounced. In her



view, immigrants are taking away jobs, and “misusing the freedom that [South Africans] fought for.” Delilah’s attitudes toward blacks and immigrants represents a distinct departure from the cosmopolitan ideology of “Rainbowism” and *Ubuntu*.

At the same time, these attitudes can be seen as a secondary layer of beliefs and commitments, insofar as they seem to extend less from self-standing biases than from economic problems in the community. Although the particular racial valence that these attitudes take on might be construed as a sign of apartheid’s legacy, there is no cause to imagine that Delilah, or any of the other interview participants from her community, for that matter, subscribe to racial views on principle—or that such views would even arise were it not for Bonteheuwel’s deep socioeconomic malaise. On the contrary, there *is* reason to think of these attitudes as forms of redirected discontent. Like many other township residents who are no longer engaged with politics, Delilah seemed largely disinterested in broad social or political issues. Abstractions such as the “rainbow nation” or *Ubuntu* have minimal purchase in her worldview, such that when asked about these concepts, she automatically transposed them into a more concrete problem, such as the marginalization of coloureds in government policy, or settled on a different, presumably more salient issue altogether. Similar transpositions of abstract ideals into concrete situations were performed in other interviews, where these concepts often failed to elicit a direct response. Likewise, Delilah’s concern was primarily reserved for the issues most immediate to her community: the pervasiveness of gang violence in Bonteheuwel, the indifference of elected officials, the inertia of law enforcement. Bonteheuwel, she expressed, is “forgotten”—and not only forgotten, but forgotten in comparison to other black townships.

Delilah’s attitudes and feelings of discontent are widely shared among many of the Bonteheuwel residents with whom I spoke. Her resentment of black and immigrant communities

suggests that the economic problems that currently plague townships like Bonteheuwel may pose a significant impediment to reconciliation, which cosmopolitan discourse can only obfuscate in the short term. The ubiquity of concern with economic issues—with inequality, service provisions, and unemployment—across all 28 interviews points to the limitations of South Africa’s reconciliation narratives. While many interviewees expressed a deep reverence for Mandela and an enduring commitment to his ideals, it is clear from their responses that cracks are surfacing in the cosmopolitan narrative. Slogans like “rainbow nation,” “forgiveness,” “humanity,” and “diversity” are dealt with irony and skepticism. On these grounds, it may be necessary to qualify the Foucauldian relation between power and discourse with the following comment: if historico-ideological narratives intrinsically perform an important censoring function in providing the discursive terms for certain issues and not others, their instrumental capacity as a state *dispositif* is nevertheless constrained by substantive needs and considerations. If anything, the ironic usage of reconciliation terminology would seem to presage an insurgence of subaltern discourses, of counter-narratives and counter-memories, where the hegemonic discourse cannot but fail to offer adequate terms of contestation.

### **Hiding from the Past: On Rwanda’s Politics of Silence**

Unlike the South African interviewees, the Rwandans with whom I spoke were significantly more reticent in their responses. When asked about the reconciliation process, the majority of Rwandans whom I interviewed gave formulaic answers that seemed to deliberately employ the vocabulary, slogans, and catchphrases of Rwanda’s national unity discourse. Such compliance with the discursive terms of the RPF regime characterized my interviews with rural

participants to a noticeably greater extent than those with residents of Kigali city. While all six rural interviewees maintained unambiguously positive views on reconciliation and nation-building, several of the urban interviewees managed to convey highly veiled criticisms of the RPF-led reconciliation process. The use of silence in particular was conspicuous. Oftentimes, the silences that punctuated interviews seemed to be of greater signification than the spoken responses, which were subject to the political and legal constraints previously discussed. These forms of implicit communication were invariably used by well-educated interviewees who had professional, academic, or civic careers in Kigali.

Allen, a postgraduate history student in Kigali, was one participant who made use of these implicit communications. Our interview took place in English, notably without the translator present.<sup>2</sup> When asked about the role of national identity in the reconciliation process, he gave an ambivalent response, affirming the idea of “Rwandanness,” followed by what seemed to suggest an overt criticism:

“[Rwandanness] has encouraged people to know there is really a background where they are coming from, where there is an affiliation to their identity...From my understanding, people should know their history, should know their identity, should know their background, where they are coming from. Hiding, not talking about it, I think that is not the issue. What caused the differences, that’s the main issue. That’s what should be resolved rather than focusing on hiding things.”

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<sup>2</sup> The few interviews that were conducted in English rather than Kinyarwanda seemed to be more candid, possibly due to the translator’s absence. In view of Rwanda’s stringent speech laws, it is conceivable that interviewees were more likely to self-censor in the presence of a fellow Rwandan.

Here, Allen begins by upholding the official stance of the RPF government—that Rwandanness constitutes the “background where [people] are coming from”—and thereby suggests that national identity is the relevant historical affiliation. However, he goes on to make the ostensibly innocuous assertion that “people should know their history...should know where they are coming from.” At first blush, his second statement appears to be compatible with the previous; this would indeed have been the case, if the “history” and “background” to which he refers in this instance were to be read as “Rwandan” or national history. Yet what follows undermines this interpretation. The references to “hiding” indicates that the history in question, that which people ought to know, is something other than the RPF-sanctioned account. By hiding the real historical narrative, he implies, the Rwandan government is merely circumventing rather than resolving the issues at hand. When pressed to clarify what he meant by “hiding,” Allen prevaricated, replying “I don’t know” and stated that he couldn’t explain anymore. However, it is reasonable to assume that Allen may have been alluding to the repressive laws enacted under the RPF regime.

Compared to my Kigali interviewees, the rural farmers with whom I spoke unanimously volunteered their support for the RPF’s official stance on reconciliation and seemed to consciously make use of its discursive terms. Among the six people in the village whom I interviewed, four had played a major role in the Gacaca courts: two were judges, one served on the appeals court, and one had been the vice president of the property department in Gacaca. Of the other two, one was a Hutu perpetrator, and the other, a Tutsi survivor. These interviews were arranged and coordinated in advance through a point person; it is thus conceivable that these interview participants brought forward by the community were those who would be most inclined to offer socially and politically acceptable perspectives on the reconciliation process. For the same reason, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was only one perpetrator among the six

who were chosen to be interviewed. Overall, most of the rural participants asserted that the reconciliation process was already over, while the few who suggested the contrary were careful to shift the remaining burden onto a slim minority of inveterate conservatives in Rwandan society. There are several reasons, however, to treat these responses with a grain of skepticism. First of all, Rwanda's laws restricting "divisive" speech probably made it risky for interviewees to be frank about their views, particularly in the presence of an outsider. Secondly, the official positions that many of these interview participants held may have curtailed their capacity to criticize the institutions they represented. Finally, as some scholars have suggested, rural Rwandans are far less disposed in general to express unfavorable views of the government and reconciliation (Newbury 1998, Thomson 2011). With these considerations in mind, I turn to the profuse body of secondary literature on Rwanda to supplement my following analysis of the rural interviews.

In nearly all the interviews, the phrases "bad ideology" and "bad government" were reiterated. These were represented as the primary, if not the sole, source of responsibility for the genocide. The "bad ideology" narrative, offered by several interviewees, characterizes the perpetrators of genocide as ingenuous Rwandans who had been duped into committing crimes by a renegade regime. In the words of Etienne, a local community leader who had served in Gacaca, "people's minds were not stable" under the Habyarimana government. Here, Etienne represents the genocide as a fit of madness, thereby exculpating members of the community who had participated from full responsibility. In a similar vein, other interviewees suggested that perpetrators had been "blinded," "tricked" or "forced" by the previous government. Such discursive emphasis on deception and insanity coheres with the RPF narrative of the genocide as a radical rupture fomented by a nefarious regime and European meddling. The interviewees'

historical self-interpretation performs a dual function in this instance: first, it reinforces the reconciliation mantra that genocide can “never again” happen in Rwanda with a pathologizing explanation of the root causes for 1994 (Bilewicz & Vollhardt 2012); and second, it isolates responsibility for the genocide in assigning blame to a select group of political elites and outside forces (Broch-Due 2004, Englund 1994). While this account bolsters the RPF’s claim to national “oneness,” it nonetheless conveys a distorted view of events—overlooking the systematic planning that preceded the genocide (Mamdani 2014, Straus 2013), and in turn, obviating the moral imperative of historical accountability (Beswick 2010).

The rural participants with whom I spoke invariably asserted that national identity had replaced ethnicity as the principal form of affiliation in present-day Rwanda. National unity was avowed by a number of interviewees in markedly similar terms and phrasings, i.e. “Rwandans are one,” “the people as one,” and “[the people] like one person, one Rwandan.” Most acknowledged that they were cognizant of the ethnic identities of people within their own village, but went on to insist that this information was no longer relevant. According to Etienne, the current Rwandan government is responsible for restoring things to “the way they [had been] fifty years ago”: “That harmony, back then, is what is happening now, because we know the consequences of genocide,” he said. Etienne’s remark here affirms the RPF national narrative of return to the wholeness of the Banyarwanda. Yet the personal account of Jean, a Tutsi survivor, belies this myth of return. Recounting instances of mobs burning Tutsi farms and ministers preaching genocidal violence, Jean noted that the escalation of anti-Tutsi sentiment began as early as the 1970s when he was still a child. Here, Jean’s recalled history accords with the historical record; for the scholarship on Rwanda indicates that the origins of virulent anti-Tutsi discrimination reaches back to the birth of the First Republic, with series of Tutsi massacres

recorded in the early 1960s and 1973 (Lemarchand 2002, Straus 2013). Given this historical context, it remains uncertain where “back then”—the originary, or prelapsarian, state of interethnic harmony—can be located: if not fifty years in the past, then how much further back in the recesses of historical memory? To Tutsi monarchial rule, or even before? In no explicit terms did Jean repudiate Rwanda’s nationalist discourse; yet his personal remembrance may in itself be seen as a form of discursive resistance: a Foucauldian counter memory, as it were, which inherently challenges the fixed, stable, and monolithic account of history authorized by the RPF (Foucault 1977; Goldberg, Porat, & Schwarz 2006).

When asked whether they thought reconciliation had been achieved, most interviewees answered in the affirmative and cited examples of interethnic conciliation to support their response. Several participants, however, conceded that “some” or “a few” still retained genocide ideology; this recalcitrant minority, they suggested, was responsible for the continuation of the reconciliation process. By attributing the remnants of “bad ideology” to an otherized minority, the interviewees were subsequently able to distance themselves from the genocidal past. However, the differences in response to this question between the only Tutsi who was not involved in high-level workings of the local Gacaca court and the rest of the group points to subtle fissures within the community itself. A survivor of the genocide, Jean lost his wife and children in the genocide. He began by praising the actions of the RPF government, with the comment that “The peace and harmony that we see today, that is the actual government.” Here, he upholds the official view of the genocide as a radical rupture by casting the previous regime as not- “actual” or somehow unreal. Later in the interview, however, Jean asserted that reconciliation “will never be completed.” When asked to elaborate on this response, he characterized reconciliation as a process that “will have to always be here and take place”:

“anytime that someone commits a crime,” he continued, “they will need to come and reconcile with you.” These statements are rather ambiguous, and from a surface-level reading, might be dismissed as general bromides on reconciliation. Yet within the context of the previous assertion—that the reconciliation process “will never be completed”—Jean’s comments seems to imply that crimes are ongoing, that they can happen “anytime” including in the present day. In a similar vein, Jean later remarks that “crimes against humanity will never cease to happen,” another generalization which seems to say little at first. However, the connotation is that Rwanda cannot consider itself immunized from the possibility of genocidal violence. This implicit suggestion directly contravenes the government’s account of the genocide as a bygone aberration; for Jean’s statement that reconciliation “will have to always be here [in Rwanda]” in itself presupposes the continuation of interethnic tensions within the country.

Across my Rwanda interviews, there seemed to be an overlapping concern with the visible or tangible signs of harmony. Maintaining the appearance of reconciliation seemed to take particular precedence in the rural village, for which the cost of conflict is considerably high, given the close working conditions and prevalence of cohabitation between Hutu and Tutsi (Buckley-Zistel 2012). “Sharing” came up in interviews with several different people, who cited the practice of sharing food or drink between victims and perpetrators as evidence that the reconciliation process had been successful. Intermarriage was also brought up frequently. According to Olivier, a judge in the local Gacaca court, “It is not surprising to see a perpetrator and victim getting married together.” This statement was, in turn, affirmed by Etienne, who said that people were “sharing, marrying, like one hundred years ago.” Given the lack of empirical data on Rwanda, it is difficult to confirm these claims about intermarriage. However, Susanne Buckley-Zistel’s research indicates that while intermarriage between victim and perpetrator



families may not be uncommon in certain communities, this may be more due to pragmatic concerns than a genuine desire for reconciliation (2006). In fact, intermarriage often happens against the will of the larger family. The small number of Tutsi survivors and the essential role of marriage in rural life ensure that Tutsi are often compelled by circumstance to marry Hutu. Likewise, Buckley-Zistel notes that when asked about coexistence, many replied that they share drinks, but only under obligation (2012). Indeed, some Rwandans said they felt forced to forgive and were only obeying the RFP government's directives because they had no choice. Buckley-Zistel's interviews suggests that while practices like sharing and intermarriage may constitute an important component of reconciliation, the entire process cannot be reduced to solely its surface-level elements.<sup>3</sup> The "strategy of 'pretending peace,'" by simply erasing the visible signs of tension, may indeed contribute to the build-up of tensions (Buckley-Zistel 2006). In this context, the silence of participants speaks volumes. In Allen's words, it is difficult to gauge how far the reconciliation process has come despite the signs of apparent harmony, since most Rwandans do not speak what they feel.

### **Speaking Truth to Power in South Africa and Rwanda**

The preceding interview analyses have shown that while the basic Foucauldian understanding of the relation between truth and power holds as a broad construct of discourse formation (Foucault 1976), hegemonic narratives of reconciliation and nation-building may

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<sup>3</sup> For other studies supporting Buckley-Zistel's research, see Thomson (2011) on the resistance of rural Rwandans to national unity discourse and Clark (2014) on in-country criticisms of the reconciliation process based on interviews with Gacaca participants.

nonetheless be contested by subaltern productions of counter-memories and counter-discourses (Foucault 1977). Indeed, my research indicates that the relationship between historico-ideological narratives and community-level responses to reconciliation may best be represented as a continuous dialectic, rather than a vertical handing down of discursive terms from state to subject (Bell 2003). What preconditions the reconciliation process is thus a constant, dynamic contestation between large-scale historical mythologies and oppositional memories (Bell 2008, Irwin-Zarecka 2004). In this regard, discourse itself becomes the site of transitional negotiation, dispute, and eventually conciliation. This agonistic framework of discursive memory construction points to the instrumental limits of state-imposed narratives (Bell 2008): in South Africa, the cosmopolitan ideal of the rainbow nation, and in Rwanda, the nationalist account of the Banyarwanda. Against these homogenizing myths of national self-construction, personal narratives emerge as forms of resistance in themselves. In the telling of counter-memories and counter-narratives, the everyday concerns, hopes, and frustrations of local communities come to the fore and will no longer be stifled.

As my analysis of the South Africa interviews indicates, the universalizing discourse of cosmopolitanism cannot permanently occlude the claims of the economically marginalized. If Rwanda's nationalist discourse expressly underpins and reinforces its political restrictions on "divisionism," South Africa's cosmopolitan framework of reconciliation fulfills a more overt instrumental function in precluding, rather than explicitly suppressing, certain discursive spaces. The discourse of "rainbow nation" lacks the conceptual and terminological tools to address issues relating to structural and socioeconomic inequality (Barchiesi 1999). Consequently, these considerations have been sidelined in public and political discourse, despite the overwhelming and near-uniform concern of ordinary South Africans with economic and systemic problems

(Mani 2008). As the interviews have shown, however, marginalized South Africans have made creative use of hegemonic narratives, cynically appropriating the slogans of reconciliation to use in their own critiques. The interpolation of “rainbow nation” discourse into expressions of “Other”-resentment, on the other hand, signals a potentially darker side to these subaltern contestations. In such cases, one finds cosmopolitan discourse co-opted into denunciations of perceived Others, on the grounds of nothing other than a failed “Rainbowism” (Myambo 2010). Here, the cosmopolitan ethos of reconciliation itself becomes a target of resentment and suspicion, where the systemic legacies of apartheid would seem to expose its pretensions to non-racialism as hypocritical, and its jejune inclusivity, as fundamentally inequitable. Even as most South Africans continue to pay discursive tribute to Rainbowist values, the proliferation of social and economic unrest in the country bodes ill for reconciliation in the long term (Bond 2013); for it is apparent that in order to bring about a lasting concord, cosmopolitan discourses must be substantiated by actual reforms.

While South Africa’s cosmopolitan narrative instates an inclusive view of citizenship as the basis of reconciliation, Rwanda’s nationalist discourse offers an explicitly exclusive account of Rwandan identity. If South African cosmopolitanism presupposes the absence of an “Other,” Rwandan nationalism requires continuous drawings and re-drawings of the boundary between self and Other (Buckley-Zistel 2006); for “Rwandanness” is inherently predicated on the preexistence of the non-Rwandan, the alien and the hostile. This delimitation of the outside, so to speak, might be seen as the precondition of any nation-state (Foucault 2003); and indeed, the Rwandan project of reconciliation is as much a project of nation-building as it is of restoring harmony. For the RPF, the stakes of historical self-constitution—of articulating an “I” in opposition to the third-person Other, as it were—are particularly high, given the tenuous basis of

Rwandanness in substantive historical and cultural commonalities.<sup>4</sup> Counter-memories and counter-narratives, against the backdrop of insecure nationalism, can only be seen as an existential threat to nation itself. The fragility of historical identity, in turn, translates into a restrictive politics, which seeks to pre-emptively stifle subversive memories. Under these political conditions, the speaking of personal truths to power is potentially fatal. It follows that ordinary Rwandans cannot test and contest the perimeters of reconciliation discourse in the manner of South Africans; and yet, there is perhaps a sense in which the telling of personal narratives, personal truths, in itself constitutes an affirmation of selfhood—of the particular individual whose life and memory inevitably exceeds the boundaries of official history (O’Riley 2008).

Reconciliation narratives function as a means of affirming and satisfying ideologico-political aims for both South African and Rwandan regimes. In the former case, the liberal-cosmopolitan discourse of reconciliation implicitly reinforces and coheres with the country’s neoliberal economic system, insofar as its atomizing and universalistic terms are unsuited to articulating structural problems (Peet 2002, Terreblanche 2002). In Rwanda, the discourse of national “oneness” offers moral and political justification for the RPF’s authoritarian policies by representing those who oppose the regime as potentially dangerous extremists (Melvin 2010, Samset 2011). The top-down transmission of ideologico-political narratives remains, at the same time, in perpetual engagement with the local and the communal. In this process, community-level actors or “ordinary” persons, so to speak, will often appropriate and translate hegemonic

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<sup>4</sup> As Mamdani (2014) notes, the Banyarwanda does not exclusively correspond to Rwandans, but numbers over 20 million dispersed across multiple African states. Hence, if the Banyarwanda is taken as a singular ethnic group, it would be the largest one in East Africa. Such a broad cultural basis for Rwandan identity problematizes the RPF’s nation-building project.

discourses into familiar terms. This hermeneutic impulse of transposing abstract concepts into the immediate concerns of quotidian life was distinctive in both the South Africa and Rwanda interviews. While South Africans responded to general questions about reconciliation with specific anecdotes about racial inequality or local community relations, Rwandans chose to interpret reconciliation in terms of concrete sharing practices. Disregarding the different attitudinal valences of these responses, the focus in each is placed on the same type of considerations: on the particular as opposed to the general, the concrete as opposed to the abstract, the local as opposed to the universal. One may thus conclude that notwithstanding the singularity of the South African and Rwandan transitions, what remains constant between these two cases is the salience of the everyday. This shared emphasis on quotidian life serves perhaps as a reminder that reconciliation is not merely a normative value system to be contested in discursive arenas, but a lived practice of community-rebuilding—of reconstituting, in other words, the complex matrix of interpersonal relations on which any abstraction must indeed be founded.

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