

SILENCE, INCREDULITY AND DISARRAY: YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF HISTORY EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY RWANDA

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Résumé

Le contrôle absolu exercé par l'actuel gouvernement du Rwanda sur les interprétations proposées de l'histoire du pays a fait l'objet de nombreuses analyses. Des réunions organisées à l'échelon local aux activités de commémoration, en passant par les programmes diffusés par les médias et les camps de 'rééducation', de multiples moyens visent à imposer une seule lecture du passé – et du futur – du Rwanda. L'histoire enseignée dans les écoles du pays représente également un puissant moyen de communication. Les programmes d'enseignement font opportunément l'impasse sur certains épisodes de violence endurés par la population rwandaise, ou en offre une version excessivement simplifiée.

Sur la base de plusieurs mois d'immersion réalisée au sein de classes d'écoles secondaires, cet article montre comment la nature 'professorale' des enseignements habituellement prodigués au Rwanda empêche les élèves de partager leurs points de vue sur l'histoire, ou leur parcours personnel en particulier. La majorité ne se retrouve pas dans l'histoire enseignée. Nombreux sont les élèves qui se disent frustrés du manque d'objectivité et de contrastes affichés lorsque certains épisodes critiques du passé sont abordés. Cet article révèle comment ces jeunes insatisfaits ('struggling') en viennent à développer trois stratégies prioritaires – parfois concomitantes – pour faire face au processus d'apprentissage de l'histoire ressenti comme frustrant : une auto-censure (silence) ; un désintérêt ou scepticisme marqué à l'égard des cours d'histoire (incrédulité) ; ou encore une négation de leur propre passé voire de leur appartenance identitaire (désorientation). Il apparaît que ces attitudes sont tout sauf favorables à un processus de réconciliation authentique et durable au Rwanda.

1. INTRODUCTION

The education of young people is a central concern to authorities in a country where history has been used and abused to justify violence and where two-thirds of the population are under 25 years old. The politics of history in post-genocide Rwanda is analysed in various contributions.¹

¹ See LONGMAN, T., RUTAGENGWA, T., "Memory, Identity, and Community in Rwanda", in STOVER, E., WEINSTEIN, H. (eds.), *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 162-182; BUCKLEY-ZISTEL, S., "Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda", *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 76, no. 2, 2006, pp. 131-150; HODGKIN, M., "Reconciliation in Rwanda: Education, History and the State", *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2006, pp. 199-211; BUCKLEY-ZISTEL, S., "We are Pretending Peace: Local Memory and the Absence of Social Transformation and Reconciliation in Rwanda", in CLARK, Ph., KAUFMAN, Z. (eds.), *After Genocide: Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 125-143; BURNET, J., "Whose genocide? Whose truth? Representations of Victim and Perpetrator in Rwanda", in HINTON, A., O'NEIL, K. (eds.), *Genocide: Truth, Memory and Representation*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 80-110; LEMARCHAND, R., "The politics of memory in

Research that focuses on history education – progressively reintroduced in the teaching curricula since 1999 – identifies the following patterns: the history programmes contain grave omissions regarding the nature and types of violence endured by the people of Rwanda; they display a simplistic narrative of the genocide courageously halted by the Rwandan Patriotic Army; and the programmes' didactical architecture leaves little space – if any – for the students to contribute to the process of knowledge acquisition.²

To date, most of the existing literature on the teaching of history in post-genocide Rwanda provides general descriptions of the political context of education, analysis of curricula and textbooks/teaching material, or – in rare cases – some classroom observations. It is therefore necessary to move beyond existing knowledge. This research attempted to do so by listening to what young people have to say and follows the approach of the former action-research project conducted by the Human Rights Center of Berkeley in Rwanda and Lindsay McLean Hilker, among others.³

In doing so, the objective of the data collection was to update the empirical material available on what young Rwandans have to say about history and history teaching more generally. Most of the available contributions to date

post-genocide Rwanda”, in CLARK, Ph., KAUFMAN, Z. (eds.), *After Genocide: Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 65-76; McLEAN HILKER, L., “Everyday ethnicities: identity and reconciliation among Rwandan youth”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 11, no. 1, March 2009, pp. 81-100; ZORBAS, E., “What does reconciliation after genocide mean? Public transcripts and hidden transcripts in post-genocide Rwanda”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2009, pp. 127-147; IBRECK, R., “The politics of mourning: Survivor contributions to memorials in post-genocide Rwanda”, *Memory Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2010, pp. 330-343; KING, E., “Memory Controversies in Post-Genocide Rwanda: Challenges for Peacebuilding”, *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2010, pp. 293-309.

² See FREEDMAN, S. *et al.*, “Confronting the Past in Rwandan Schools”, in STOVER, E., WEINSTEIN, H. (eds.), *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 248-265; MUGOREWASE, H., *Étude comparée de l'enseignement de l'histoire au Tronc Commun en milieu rural et urbain. Cas des districts Butamwa et Nyarugenge*, Kigali, KIE, Mémoire présenté pour l'obtention du grade de licencié en Lettres avec Éducation, 2005; WALKER-KELEHER, J., “Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Conflict and Education: The Case of Rwanda”, *PRAXIS: The Fletcher Journal of Human Security*, vol. XXI, 2006, pp. 35-53; WEINSTEIN, H., FREEDMAN, S., HUGHSON, H., “School voices: challenges facing education systems after identity-based conflicts”, *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2007, pp. 41-71; FREEDMAN, S., WEINSTEIN, H., MURPHY, K., LONGMAN, T., “Teaching History after Identity-Based Conflicts: The Rwanda Experience”, *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2008, pp. 663-690; BUCKLEY-ZISTEL, S., “Nation, narration, unification? The politics of history teaching after the Rwandan genocide”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2009, pp. 31-53; McLEAN HILKER, L., “The Role of Education in Driving Conflict and Building Peace – The Case of Rwanda”, Background paper prepared for the Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2011, UNESCO, 2010.

³ FREEDMAN, S., WEINSTEIN, H., MURPHY, K., LONGMAN, T., *op. cit.*; McLEAN HILKER, L., “Everyday ethnicities...”, *op. cit.*

offer a reflection based on field research conducted in the early or mid-2000s. It was therefore necessary to re-interrogate the reflexive dynamics at work among Rwandan youngsters, nearly twenty years after the genocide and a decade after the formal accession of President Kagame to the presidency of Rwanda, accompanied by a reinforcement of the authoritarian management of the public discourse operated by the Rwandan government since 1994.⁴

In particular: what do young people say about history nowadays in Rwanda? How do they ‘speak’ history? And what attitudes do young Rwandans develop in relation to history taught at school? These are the questions which led our reflection and informed the collection of student narratives in three Rwandan secondary schools in 2012.⁵

Our research aims to analyse the politics – and production – of history in Rwanda *from young people’s perspective*. It seeks to describe the reaction of Rwandan adolescents to the official narrative, their capacity to (re)enunciate history and their strategies to develop a comforting narrative of the(ir) past.⁶

The dialectical relationship between ‘history’ and ‘memory’ is a central line of inquiry in scholarship.⁷ These notions and the nature of their interaction are fundamental for our reflection as our research intends to document the relation between the official, State-ordered *history* (or historiography) and individual, possibly collective, *memories* enunciated by young people. The process of (hi)storytelling operates in the background of our analysis.

⁴ See among others LONGMAN, T., “Limitations to Political Reforms. The Undemocratic Nature of Transition in Rwanda”, in STRAUS, S., WALDORF, L. (eds.), *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence*, Madison, University of Wisconsin, 2011, pp. 25-47; REYNTJENS, F., “Constructing the Truth, Dealing with Dissent, Domesticating the World: Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda”, *African Affairs*, vol. 110, no. 438, 2011, pp. 1-34; REYNTJENS, F., *Political Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda*, New York, Cambridge University press, 2013.

⁵ Field observation and interviews for this research were conducted by the first author (GD). The second author (BI) has also undertaken extensive research in Rwanda (fieldwork is documented in INGELAERE, B., *Learning to be ‘Kinyarwanda’. Reflections on Fieldwork, Method and Data in the Study of Rwanda’s Transition. Working Paper 2013.13*, University of Antwerp, Institute of Development Policy and Management). This fieldwork experience contributed to situating the research findings in the local sociology of knowledge analysed previously: INGELAERE, B., “Do we understand life after genocide? Center and Periphery in the construction of knowledge on Rwanda”, *African Studies Review*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2010, pp. 41-59.

⁶ Indeed, “les adolescents ne vont pas simplement recevoir, mais ils vont réinterpréter ce qu’ils apprennent, ils vont le transformer en se l’appropriant” (OESER, A., *Enseigner Hitler. Les adolescents face au passé nazi en Allemagne. Interprétations, appropriations et usages de l’histoire*, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2010, p. 32).

⁷ LE GOFF, J., *Histoire et mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988 ; GILLIS, J. R., “Introduction. Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship”, in GILLIS, J. R. (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 3; NORA, P., “Entre Mémoire et Histoire” (Introduction), in NORA, P. (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984, pp. xv-xlii ; RICOEUR, P., *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*, Paris, Seuil, 2000.

Central for our research objective was then to spend time among students in order to gain their confidence. The research methodology is outlined in the next section. A third section focuses on the pedagogy adopted when teaching history, discusses pupils' participation in a classroom setting and presents comments and reflections on these practices solicited during interviews. A following section identifies a gap between 'privileged' and 'struggling' students that seems to cross-cut the classic Hutu/Tutsi 'ethnic' divide. A mixture of malaise and discontent characterizes the attitude of those populating the 'struggling' category to which the majority of students belong. These 'struggling' students adopt a passive attitude shaped around three, sometimes parallel, strategies towards the history narrative communicated at school: abstaining from participating (silence), an opportunistic disinterest/scepticism towards history (incredulity) and/or the negation of one's own historicity and identity (disarray). These coping mechanisms are discussed in a fifth section. The article concludes with reflections on the difficult prospect of reconciliation in Rwanda when personal memories and identities are repressed.

2. RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY

The research started with the observation that Rwandan youngsters navigate a historico-discursive 'contested terrain'.⁸ Strong antagonistic historical representations confront one another.⁹ The Hutu/Tutsi duality not only shapes the course of Rwanda's history but contributes to the crystallization of 'stylized' representations of several historical episodes as well. Anthropologist Liisa Malkki refers to these representations as 'mythico-histories'¹⁰: a set of moral and cosmological ordering stories in which a past is evoked to make sense, give meaning to the present.

In order to account for such a process of 'historicization' among young Rwandans, it was of paramount importance that we observe actual teaching activities and speak with Rwandan students themselves in the context of a –

⁸ McLEAN HILKER, L., "Young People's Narratives of the Past (and Present)", in STRAUS, S., WALDORF, L. (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 316-330.

⁹ Among the most delicate issues of Rwanda's past usually arousing controversy, one would mention: the nature of the relationships between Hutu and Tutsi in pre-Christian Rwanda and the chronology of migratory settlements in the actual territory of Rwanda; the circumstances and casualties provoked by the 1959 'Revolution'; the merit (socio-economic development) or perversity (nepotism, genocide ideology) of the First and Second Republic regimes; the responsibility attributed to the combatants (FAR and RPA) for the casualties inflicted before 1994; the plane shooting of April 6, 1994; the development and circumstances of the genocide; the involvement of the RPA in the massacres perpetrated in neighbouring Zaire/DRC from 1996 onwards. On the parallel presence of various historical interpretations in contemporary Rwanda, see the literature cited in footnote 1.

¹⁰ MALKKI, L. H., *Purity and Exile. Violence, memory and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

relative – relationship of trust. In doing so, this research strategy took into account and sought to bypass the ‘rehearsed consensus’ or stage-setting that dominates the Rwandan socio-political environment.¹¹

In addition to the collection of ‘grey’ literature containing policies, exam copies and textbook reviews, we collected empirical data during three repeated stays of one month between February and June 2012 in three secondary-level schools of Rwanda. The schools were selected through a series of contacts established during a pre-research phase with the aim of striking a balance with respect to a number of criteria: geographical situation, urban vs. rural setting, government-aided vs. private, secondary schools vs. ‘Nine year basic education’ schools, boarding vs. day schools, quality ranking (global results obtained by the schools at national examinations), availability or not of a History-Economics-Geography (HEG) section among the curriculum options offered, etc.

The three schools visited were situated in Kigali (‘Saint André School’), Nyakinama (north, ‘Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1’) and Nyanza (south, ‘Saint Peter Igihozo’). Saint André School enjoyed the reputation of being one of the best ‘elite schools’ in the country offering a traditional, Church-based education; the school’s ranking stood in 2011 at 13th out of 1061 secondary-schools nationwide. The Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, on the other hand, represented the typical ‘Nine Year Basic Education’ school found in Rwanda’s rural areas with lower students’ performance (national ranking: 862). The particularity of the school Saint Peter Igihozo (national ranking: 232) was to offer the specialization HEG for Advanced Level students, an option which has become very rare at the national level.

An overarching research strategy of ‘active observation’ informed the research activities: we observed a maximum of history lessons (as well as some political education courses containing history-related reflections) and mixed informally with the students during their breaks, before and after lessons, during the sport activities, etc. A Rwandan assistant-interpreter accompanied us in the field in order to understand the kinyarwanda used

¹¹ INGELAERE, B., “Do we understand life after genocide? ...”, *op. cit.* We are furthermore fully aware of the nature of the Rwandan socio-political environment and its impact on research, including research on history, as discussed in numerous publications: KING, E., “From Data Problems to Data Points: Challenges and Opportunities of Research in Postgenocide Rwanda”, *African Studies Review*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2009, pp. 127-148; THOMSON, S., “Getting Close to Rwandans since the Genocide: Studying Everyday Life in Highly Politicized Research Settings”, *African Studies Review*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2010, pp. 19-34; BEGLEY, L., “The other side of fieldwork: experiences and challenges of conducting research in the border area of Rwanda/eastern Congo”, *Anthropology Matters*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2009, pp. 1-11; JESSEE, E., “The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings”, *Oral History Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2011, pp. 287-307. We are, however, not of the opinion, as some would argue, that research is impossible in Rwanda. Moreover, we are of the opinion that trust can be increased with research respondents in Rwanda.

by the students (or teachers) in some instances.¹² At the end of each month, we would request a certain number of students to meet with us for in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews. The selection of respondents strove for a gender balance as well as pupils from all education levels (Secondary One to Secondary Six).¹³ Interviews were conducted in the presence of the assistant-interpreter, with only few exceptions, and lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. Interviews were conducted in private and quiet places, though visible to 'outsiders' in order to curb any suspicion. Interview protocols stressed the voluntary nature of the interview and guaranteed full anonymity. A total of sixty-seven interviews were conducted. The aim was to solicit students' perceptions on history teaching and how these educational activities related to their personal experiences.

Elements of life story shared mostly spontaneously by the respondents during interviews provided insight into the latter's 'subjective realm'¹⁴ where factual and interpretative, objective and subjective information is combined. This material was used to explore the respondents' experience of (the politics of) history and to identify processes of ethnic identification, namely whether respondents described themselves as offspring of Hutu or Tutsi 'ancestors'.¹⁵

To identify the 'ethnic' heritage carried by the students was an element of strategic importance to explore our respondents' experience of the teaching of history. In a large majority of cases we could distinguish students as being what we called 'Hutu descendants' or 'Tutsi descendants'. While referring to the 'ethnic' heritage of the youngsters, these categorizations avoid locking current young Rwandans into 'Hutu' or 'Tutsi' labels, especially because the students that participated in the research avoided overtly associating themselves with ethnic categories. Indeed, our interviewees seemed to align with the Government's imposition of a sole 'national' (Rwandan) identity to the exclusion of any former ethnic identification. Yet, as hinted above, the

¹² English was (and is) the language mostly used in the classrooms (though poorly). Kinyarwanda was mainly used during informal talks and the individual interviews performed (see below) to accommodate the respondents (on exceptional basis, English or French were also used during the interviews depending on the will and capacity of the participating students). Due care was taken to make sure the interpreter had no official connection to the Rwandan government or administration. We also made sure – to the extent possible – that our research, including the collaboration with the Rwandan interpreter could not be readily interpreted as 'government-owned'.

¹³ Respondents were aged between 12 and 24 years old.

¹⁴ PLUMMER, K., *Documents of Life 2: An invitation to a critical humanism*, London, Sage, 2001, p. 20.

¹⁵ Obviously, a number of students were children of mixed marriages. Before the genocide, these children inherited the 'ethnic' identity of their fathers as a rule. Currently, it appears that some of our respondents developed a double loyalty to their parents' 'ethnic' identities, when others chose alternatively to identify with only one of the sides. This was evidently also the case before the genocide. Multiple testimonies exist of people who were not conscious of their ethnic identities until the latter became an organizing principle of violence.

‘official’ narrative internalized by the students did not prevent the latter to situate their origins. A systematic and context-sensitive analysis on our side took into account three types of information: (1) ‘factual’ elements of personal/familial history (violence experienced, aggressors identified, chronology and reasons of migration); (2) explicit identification with the historicity of an ethnic category of the Rwandan population as a member or descendant (being a genocide survivor or not, belonging to the post-1959 diaspora – the so-called ‘old-caseload refugees’; refugee status in Congo following the genocide, etc.)¹⁶; and (3) recourse to ‘Hutu’ or ‘Tutsi’ classic lines of history interpretation (the ‘mythico-histories’ evoked above).

3. HISTORICAL CONTENT, PEDAGOGY AND ITS RECEPTION

The teaching of history in Rwanda was suspended for many years in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.¹⁷ There was a lack of teaching staff and resources had been gravely depleted due to the massacres, looting and destruction. Most importantly, history teaching was suspended due to a need to re-think – re-formulate – Rwanda’s history. This moratorium on history teaching was eventually lifted on 1999 by the Ministry of Education.¹⁸ In practice, however, the teaching of Rwandan history remained erratic, precarious and unsystematic for a decade due to the absence of updated didactic materials and the constant hesitations of the teaching staff left with no clear guidance on what to teach. Educators would limit their inputs to very consensual parts of the history of Rwanda or skip the chapters of national

¹⁶ When necessary, complementary information was solicited in order to confirm our understanding (for instance, whether their parents lived in or outside Rwanda at the outbreak of genocide, if they felt in danger during the genocide due to their identity, etc.). We also systematically requested our respondents to summarize in a few sentences the most important features of their families’ history (see Section 5).

¹⁷ The notion of “genocide against Tutsi” is currently used in official policy inside Rwanda to refer to the ‘events’ of 1994. This label changed over the years. Initially, *itsebabwoko* (‘the destruction of a group’) was used referring to the killing of Tutsi as well as *itsebatsemba* (‘massacres’ evoking other killings as well, such the killing of Hutu). This was followed by the label *jenocide*. Recently, official discourse has changed the labelling to ‘genocide against the Tutsi’. Philip Gourevitch sees this as a strategy to reinforce a national Rwandan identity. GOUREVITCH, P., “Remembering in Rwanda”, *The New Yorker*, April 21, 2014. Evidently, and not mentioned by Gourevitch, these changes also reflect a strategy to curb certain interpretations of what happened in 1994 such as the position that there were two genocides (a genocide against Tutsi as well as a genocide against Hutu); they equally imply that certain actions, events and experiences are eclipsed from view and ‘official’ history. Whether this strategy, since it is also reflected in the education of history in schools, is effective in establishing a ‘cohesive’ Rwandan identity is part of the analysis presented in this article.

¹⁸ WEINSTEIN, H., FREEDMAN, S., HUGHSON, H., *op. cit.*

history perceived as too sensitive in the political climate.¹⁹

A first series of post-genocide textbooks for primary schools containing bits of Rwanda's history went into press in 2006. At secondary level, the history curricula currently in use for Ordinary Level (Secondary 1 – Secondary 3) was adopted in 2008 and that of Advanced Level (Secondary 4 – Secondary 6) for the HEG section in 2010. Both curricula contain an almost identical overview of Rwandan, African and world history. In 2010, the first official post-genocide secondary level teachers' guide²⁰ dedicated to the history of Rwanda was published and disseminated together with three history textbooks for students.²¹ These are the only existing textbooks to date. The fact that no secondary school textbook narrating the history of Rwanda was ever drafted until 2010 – although the authorities of Rwanda had vowed to do so as rapidly as possible – reveals the extreme sensitivity of the topic and enterprise.

Fieldwork makes clear that the discomfort among history teachers toward the teaching of Rwanda's history was still very prevalent in 2012, when fieldwork was conducted. The threat of imprisonment hanging over a statement which would be negatively perceived probably contributed to this climate of fear. The resulting hesitancy on the side of the history teachers explains partly why we only observed little active student participation in the history classes as well.

Another reason for widespread hesitation in history teaching is the prescriptive nature of the history curricula and textbooks. The teaching material lays out well-established narratives of the history of Rwanda and is univocal regarding controversial issues or episodes. The latter are presented with unbalanced and coarse arguments, over-summarized or simply absent in the textbooks. For instance *The History of Rwanda. Secondary Schools Teacher's Guide* only dedicates one paragraph to the violence which struck Rwanda in 1959 at the time of the so-called 'Revolution'.²² The same teachers guide devotes only two pages to the 1994 genocide (out of 168 pages). Whereas the *New Junior History Book's* authors depict the Belgian 'colonial' administration in harsh terms²³, they salute the 'Liberation struggle' led by the

¹⁹ Interviews with teachers, 2011 and 2012. See also FREEDMAN, S. *et al.*, *op. cit.*; HODGKIN, M., *op. cit.*; WEINSTEIN, H., FREEDMAN, S., HUGHSON, H., *op. cit.*

²⁰ REPUBLIC OF RWANDA/NATIONAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, *The History of Rwanda. Secondary Schools Teacher's Guide*, Kigali, 2010.

²¹ BAMUSANANIRE, E., NTEGE, D., *New Junior Secondary History Book 1-2-3*, 3 vols., Kampala, NetMedia Publishers, n.d. (estimated 2010).

²² See REPUBLIC OF RWANDA/NATIONAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, *op. cit.*, p. 105: "From 1st to 7th November 1959, a spark of violence erupted in Gitarama against the Tutsi and members of UNAR (Rwanda National Union Party, a nationalist, monarchist and anticolonialist and reformist Party). Some called it a 'planned revolution'. It was sparked off by members of Parmehutu and Aprosoma (two other parties). It spread to Byumba and Kibuye. Only Cyangu and Kibungu were spared."

²³ See BAMUSANANIRE, E., NTEGE, D., *New Junior Secondary History Book 2*, *op. cit.*,

Rwanda Patriotic Army of current President Kagame.²⁴

Not only did we observe that the lessons mainly seemed to bore the students under these conditions, they also expressed discontent at the history taught during interviews. Our interviewees almost unanimously deplored that many elements of the national history were missing or that the information provided was inaccurate.

We hardly talk about the events of April 1994 at school. We study the ‘causes’ and ‘effects’ of the Genocide, but quickly and superficially.²⁵

On the history of the kingdoms they would tell the truth. But when they reach the Genocide and the origins and reasons of divisionism, etc. they do not go into details.²⁶

There are parts of the history of Rwanda which do not appear on the programme. Possibly, there are chapters that the Ministry of Education does not want to include in the curriculum. Or it happens that you have information on something which the teacher does not want to talk about.²⁷

It is clear to me that they teach what they want us to know. But you will find gross exaggerations, far from the truth of what happened. I am referring to the way the events of 1994 are presented.²⁸

I don’t believe the description of a ‘peaceful all good’ ancient Rwanda (*igihugu cya amata n’ubuki*: a land of milk and honey).²⁹

I myself think that some elements taught are just myths. When pre-colonial Rwanda is always described as peaceful, it is not totally true, as we know. Think about the expansionist wars which took place... They also exaggerate when they make the *Abazungu* [Whites] responsible for all the wrongdoings of the past. When we are taught that we are all alike, I see that the school is only following what the Government disseminates as ideology on the radio...³⁰

Overall, the historical narrative presented in the textbooks looks simplistically ‘rational’ and abstract, as opposed to substantial, humanized

“During Belgian colonial rule, the White man was the absolute master and the Black man was the slave and servant.” (p. 87); on the 1959 ‘Revolution’: “Bands of young Hutu were organized by Belgian paracommandos, given matches and led to villages with orders to kill the Tutsi and burn their huts. (...) This act of violent incident was masterminded by the Belgian colonial government, and created a climate for future violence.” (*ibidem*, p. 106).

²⁴ See BAMUSANANIRE, E., NTEGE, D., *New Junior Secondary History Book 3, op. cit.*, “The armed struggle of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) to liberate Rwanda was a fight for noble values and worthy ends. (...) The Rwandan liberation struggle was therefore a product of inexorable historical forces and it was an illuminating picture of man’s desire for freedom, dignity and right to a home.” (p. 106).

²⁵ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 14-year-old.

²⁶ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 13-year-old.

²⁷ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 16-year-old.

²⁸ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 20-year-old.

²⁹ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 18-year-old.

³⁰ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 17-year-old.

and documented by personal testimonies. Moreover, the teachers deliver their subject following teaching models based on transmissive declamation, note-taking and rote learning on the part of the pupils. This is far from the 'modern', 'democratic', 'participative' or 'student-centered pedagogy' heralded in several of the Ministry of Education's guidelines and policy documents.³¹ At no point were the students invited to carry out personal research to compare diverse and diverging accounts held on certain divisive issues; nor were they encouraged to compare their own understandings to those of classmates. Associative teaching (formation of working groups among students) was occasionally practised but seemed often motivated by the teacher's desire to be discharged of active teaching, not to stimulate collaborative learning or critical reflections. Presentations following these joint activities performed in front of the classmates did not lead to debating arguments collectively, nor did it result in the identification of reflections on the topic under scrutiny. In essence, our observations confirmed the continuing pattern of teaching trends identified by previous studies³²: the pedagogy of history education does little to stimulate critical thinking, and students tend to minimize their involvement.

Illustrative was an example from Nyanza (Saint Peter Igihozo). Routinely, the teachers' notes on a given subject (mostly extracted from the official Teacher's Guide) were circulated among the students some days before the topic was to be dealt with in class. With no textbooks at their disposal, the pupils could copy the lesson's script in advance. Asked why this procedure was adopted, one history teacher invoked the poor level of English of the students: handing out scripts beforehand ensured that they would perform something during the lessons and not complain to the Dean of Studies. Yet, the students' 'performance' was dire: when answering teachers' questions or presenting group works during the lessons, the students would limit their input to mechanically reading out excerpts of the pre-drafted 'official' notes.

During interviews, students criticized the teaching methods. Many respondents stated that the teaching of history was focused too much on institutional actors, the history of government and governments to the detriment of the experiences, 'the real life of the people'. Several students expressed the wish to be more involved in the learning process:

I find that history is not only about teaching and studying, but it is also about sharing ideas among students. And this last aspect is absent from our lessons.³³

The school could show the example and provide a free space for discussion. The

³¹ RUTAYISIRE, J., KABANO, J., RUBAGIZA, J., "Redefining Rwanda's Future: The Role of Curriculum in Social Reconstruction", in TAWIL, S., HARLEY, A. (eds.), *Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion*, UNESCO, International Bureau of Education, 2004, pp. 316-373.

³² FREEDMAN, S. *et al.*, *op. cit.*; WALKER-KELEHER, J., *op. cit.*

³³ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 18-year-old.

bad and good ideas could be collectively sorted out and we would decide together for our future.³⁴

Sometimes, you cannot like the history lessons because the teachers are not experienced, they do not discuss with the students, and there is never any visit to a memorial site or a museum organized. We can speak only in terms of questions and answers, but there is never any real discussion or debate. The teacher should understand what we think and give us the chance to express ourselves more. There is no time for discussion.³⁵

History in school should not be limited to the rote learning of notebooks' pages. It would need first some sharing among students to learn history well and together. As of today, there is no personal or familial testimonies provided in school, it is only theory.³⁶

Our observations evidenced that some topics very occasionally triggered lively (even vehement) student participation. For instance: the willingness but incapacity of the Rwandan king Yuhi V Musinga to chase the Belgian administration out of Rwanda; the succession of presidents during the First and Second Republics; the presumed 'ethnicity' of the first president D. Mbonyumutwa; the circumstances of the death of President Kayibanda; the causes of the 1994 Genocide; students' genealogical and clan origins. However, pupils shared mostly anecdotal elements of information or interrogations, and their personal opinions or positions were not examined, put in perspective with regard to present-day political dynamics or interpreted through the existence of contradictory historical accounts. It shows that critical thinking is not encouraged by the education system. This was the general trend observed, with exceptions depending on the personality and know-how of the instructors:

With [teacher X] you just have to answers [her/his] questions. You are not supposed to bring your opinions. With [teacher Y], it is more possible: we must be ready to be requested to stand and give our opinions. With [teacher X] all what is needed from us is to read books and take notes. Some students feel that this is natural; but as for me I love the teachers who let us express what we think and what we have in our minds.³⁷

4. ETHNIC CATEGORIZATION AND BEYOND

Interestingly, preoccupations regarding the concealed elements of history varied from school to school. In Saint André School (Kigali), one of the 'elite schools' of the country, many students happened to be 'Tutsi descendants'. Their parents had returned to Rwanda after 1994 and enjoyed comfortable, if not luxurious, living conditions and, for some, close contacts with the

³⁴ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 20-year-old.

³⁵ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 15-year-old.

³⁶ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 18-year-old, male, Secondary 5.

³⁷ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 14-year-old.

government or the army, an influential institution in Rwanda. During the interviews, those 'privileged' students mostly expressed their eagerness to hear more about the ancient Tutsi monarchy and the perpetration of the Genocide against the Tutsi.

Since I was born after Genocide, I want to know what happened then.³⁸

My parents were not in the country during this time, therefore I am interested by what the teachers say about it.³⁹

Whereas pupils from the 'Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1' (situated in the north of Rwanda), almost all 'Hutu descendants' with parents working as farmers or day labourers, mainly shared a frustration toward another issue: the crimes committed by the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) of current president Kagame in the northern part of Rwanda, as those are silenced by the official history curricula.

We are told that the origin of Genocide was the intent to exterminate the Tutsi. If you listen to your family you realize that both Tutsi and Hutu died... So we stand half way (*dusigara mo hagati*) from the truth, without all the truth. It is the same when we talk about the war of the *Abacengezi*: Tutsi are said to have been killed. But what about the Hutu and Twa who died also?⁴⁰

Some subjects are not presented. We know about them, but nobody speaks about them. For instance the war of 1998.⁴¹

During interviews we always asked whether our student respondents sensed contradictions when comparing the school teaching and the knowledge transmitted by their families or close parents. These experiences invariably differed according to the socio-historical background of the students: 'Tutsi descendants' in a large majority denied any conflicting experiences whereas most 'Hutu descendants' directly or indirectly recognized troubling discrepancies.

However, a more subtle distinction is in order. The analysis of the research material reveals the existence of two categories that cross-cut the ethnic divide. A first group, representing a minority, gathers the 'privileged' students as described above. However, we use 'privileged' here not only to refer to many pupils' advantageous socio-economic status (this often happens to be the case) but to evoke a category of students that do not perceive a reality of censorship or muzzled complexity with regard to the process of 'historicization'. These youngsters have the 'privilege' to feel comfortable with content of the history teaching. This is the case for most of the offspring of 'old-caseload' refugees, people who returned to Rwanda in the wake of the RPA's military victory, as well as some youngsters benefiting from support of the State as genocide

³⁸ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 15-year-old.

³⁹ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 15-year-old.

⁴⁰ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 14-year-old.

⁴¹ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 17-year-old.

survivors.⁴² These ‘privileged’ students do not experience any conflict between the official and lived history since their personal socio-history resembles – or is made to accommodate – the official historiography disseminated by the State. Several ‘Hutu descendants’, whose families had also been part of the pre-1994 diaspora or were persecuted during the genocide, joined this group. In addition, a number of students of ‘Hutu descent’ and belonging to ‘well-off’ families also adhered to the official historiography in order not to compromise their socio-economic status.

It is the members of this ‘trans-ethnic’ category of students that dare to ‘speak’ history in the name of all. Many even claim to exclusively possess the truth to be inculcated to others.

Some would say: ‘It is not only the Hutu who killed; there were killings from both sides’. But they do not have proof, so we are losing time for nothing...⁴³

The school should approach some students who have a closed-up mind, who have ‘codes’ in their mentalities which give them an unwillingness to participate in commemoration activities. We say in Kinyarwanda ‘Bafite codes’ [They have codes] or ‘Bafite password’... Some mock the orphans of Genocide and the FARG beneficiaries. School must ‘un-code’ them.⁴⁴

With the large illiterate populations we have in the villages the policy has been to maintain them silent. Now, the NURC [National Unity and Reconciliation Commission] is organizing debates so that the populations listen. It is this commission which holds the truth. If we were to let the populations talk, they will say all kinds of irresponsible things, which could lead to conflicts in the villages. Therefore the government is setting limits which must not be transgressed. The former crime perpetrators are conscious that they must learn the truth.⁴⁵

At the extreme opposite side stand those we identified as the ‘struggling’ students. In contrast to their ‘privileged’ comrades, these youngsters – a large majority of the students – often experienced violence and troubling life experiences (some being orphans as well) left *unrecognized*. Equipped with all kinds of contradictory and fragmented narratives, and including a mix of Hutu, Tutsi or ‘half-blood’ descendants too, such students usually

⁴² Youngsters qualifying as Genocide survivors or described as having been somehow affected by the perpetration of the Genocide receive subsidies emanating from the *Fonds d’assistance aux rescapés du genocide* (FARG) to pursue their elementary, then possibly university studies. Notwithstanding irregularities in the attribution of the assistance, the allocation of subsidies by FARG to Tutsi students exclusively is seen by many (and by many Hutu classmates to start with) as an inequitable measure. On the FARG issue, see WALKER-KELEHER, J., *op. cit.* and McLEAN HILKER, L., “The Role of Education...”, *op. cit.* Furthermore, many FARG beneficiaries become members of a very influent organization reuniting students survivors of the genocide – the *Association des étudiants rescapés du genocide* (AERG), a move which usually reinforces further their social and psychological base.

⁴³ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 19-year-old.

⁴⁴ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 18-year-old.

⁴⁵ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 16-year-old.

lack information about the(ir) past and find themselves uncomfortable and/or illegitimate to contribute to the public discussion over Rwanda's history. Their complex historicity does not conform to the official narrative, with the Hutu survivors of RPA attacks constituting the most negated in their existentiality. Nevertheless, it was not rare to also record genocide survivors complaining that the teaching of history does not account for their terrible experiences, represent the complexity of their fate.

It can happen that you have some knowledge on one issue and the teacher gives an explanation which is not corresponding to what you know. When you go ask to your family again you realize that the information given here and there conflicts. So you wonder: is there one same history or two different histories?⁴⁶

What I talk about with my mum, for instance the real causes of the genocide, is never mentioned in school.⁴⁷

At school they teach a history which they present as verified; at home you are told information which elders are supposed to have seen with their own eyes, so... what do you do? You stay in the necessity to access the truth, or at least you want to understand the reason of the conflicting narratives.⁴⁸

About the war after Genocide they teach you at school that the *Abacengezi* looted and destroyed the villages. At home, one tells you that this is not all of it, that the *Abacengezi* used to come to secure the hills too. If they used to destroy the bridges it was for the purpose of preventing the army to use them. So you find that the accounts diverge.⁴⁹

My teachers never provided enough details, but only general information. We did not talk a lot of the genocide period. It was like if the teacher only taught what had to be memorized, that is: the causes and consequences of the genocide, the mistakes which should not be repeated, etc. As for us, the genocide survivors, we know exactly what happened, but the children of families which returned from abroad after the genocide do not know anything of what really occurred.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 16-year-old.

⁴⁷ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 16-year-old.

⁴⁸ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 14-year-old.

⁴⁹ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 17-year-old.

⁵⁰ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 18-year-old.

5. THE STUDENTS (RE-)ACT: THREE COPING STRATEGIES TO CONFRONT THE TEACHING

Previous sections detailed the pedagogy of history teaching, provided a general insight into the content that is taught and identified the existence of two categories of students, to a certain extent cross-cutting the ethnic divide, that have a different relationship with the State-sanctioned production of history. Under these conditions, the research objective was to analyse pupils' *attitudes* towards the historical knowledge presented. How is this historical material processed and appreciated? What are the collective and individual strategies developed, if any? If conflicts of interpretation emerge: how do classmates manage them?

A cautious silence or self-censorship

The first and dominant pattern almost logically follows from the teaching practice detailed above. Discussing arguments, debating contrasted historiographical trends, or inferring that uncertainty exists over some elements of the past (for instance by leaving questions unanswered) were nearly nonexistent occurrences during our presence in the classrooms. Hence, the management of occasionally conflicting narratives is withdrawn from any public deliberation. The pedagogy adopted combined with an awareness of the repressive political culture instilled by the government (with its police, military and judicial arms) makes pupils opt for constant self-censorship. Observing a cautious silence is a strategy adopted by a large cohort of students, and recognized as such:

You must understand the context of our history. We cannot ask many questions about history. At *umudugudu* [village] level we may have a debate but even there we are not allowed to ask questions; someone comes, speaks and leaves the place without any discussion. When there is some time for questioning, nobody dares to ask anything on the context of Genocide. At school we might also fear something but before all we look for good marks in the exams.⁵¹

You cannot say everything. Think about this one man who called the radio last April asking why one would only talk about the Genocide and not of the other crimes committed during the wars. He was arrested. As a result, we live in fear.⁵²

Everyone is asking oneself: why can't I express freely what I think? And that affects oneself in the inside. It is like if you need to take cocaine to control yourself. The Government is not trustful enough. That said, not all my classmates are conscious about this. As for me, I manage to give answers but without ostensibly raising my hand. At several occasions, you'd better shut up than speak. Some questions, I keep them for myself, for instance, the plane crash of April

⁵¹ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 20-year-old.

⁵² Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 18-year-old.

6... Or, you cannot question the ambition of Paul Kagame to occupy power. Regarding this issue, it is better to stay calm and take it easy...⁵³

Sometimes, you perceive genocide ideology in the discourses. We have different pasts. About one third of the students do not talk spontaneously, they limit themselves. I know what and how they think. They form small groups with people whom they trust. Back in 2006, 2007, it was even stronger. The bottom-line is that there is no freedom of speech here. You cannot trust everyone. The authorities can do whatever they want with your family, cause you problems, so you shut up, you need to limit yourself constantly. What the teacher teaches you in Senior 1, you repeat it until Senior 6. I also limit myself; we need to conform to what comes from above. This is because of our history. Our parents tell us that they cannot talk openly, so we do like them.⁵⁴

Those opinions must, however, be kept in proportion along the divide already portrayed between 'privileged' students and 'struggling' youngsters. The former tended to hint that no subject was taboo and that it was up to the students to ask pertinent questions ("*Taboos do not exist anymore!*"), while the latter regularly referred to a constraining discursive context. Another important reason very often brought forward to justify one's containment was the need to proceed carefully in order not to risk re-traumatization of some students (although it appeared that the argument was raised by many as a pretext).

You can ask a question which can disturb other students. So there is some limitation. You do not fear the teacher but other students who could support with difficulty what you say. All of this relates to our ethnic group... If you raise this kind of interrogation, a Tutsi could react negatively to it, answer back to you and accuse you of rubbing salt in the wounds.⁵⁵

I choose to shut up to avoid hurting someone because I was myself not in Rwanda during the Genocide. If you ask a question publically you always can hurt someone. Depending on the topic I could allow myself to make a commentary but never on questions of ethnicity or identity. I just don't say anything.⁵⁶

Incredulity or scepticism

Many of the 'struggling' students pictured in the previous section seemed to incorporate a second navigating strategy paralleling the 'silence' option: a deliberate disinterest or scepticism towards history disguising a profound *incredulity*. This attitude demonstrates how these 'struggling' students are stranded in their reflection process since they are intellectually abandoned by their family entourage (if it exists at all) as well as by the school.

⁵³ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 18-year-old.

⁵⁴ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 16-year-old.

⁵⁵ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 17-year-old.

⁵⁶ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 20-year-old, male.

I trust no one. I stay without one truth, rather half way through it. Imagine that you go ask a question but the answer is not satisfying. So you go ask your question somewhere else and you end up with an answer about 50% different from the first one. What do you do? Do you take both, do you choose one? It is useless to seek the position of one and the other and on and on... This is breaking your heart (*usandara umutima*). So I prefer to leave my questions aside and I stay without truth. You just remember what the teacher says and you say what he wants to hear. The same happens at home.⁵⁷

I manage the situation by saying to myself only what I think. When I write answers on the paper during exams I put all what I think aside. Then again, I continue my normal life.⁵⁸

I consider all truths existing and I then work out my conscience to build my own truth. We receive all the contradictions as they are. You must accept this and life goes on because you know that this is not only happening to you but to everyone.⁵⁹

These disappointed youngsters seemed to abstain from any history-oriented discussions and reflections held informally out of the classrooms as well, among peers for instance.

Most students are not interested in talking about history. We have different pasts, you cannot say whatever you want. Sometimes, you get cursed. Some young people are interested by the Genocide, others do not want to talk about it as their parents died or are in prison.⁶⁰

We don't share a lot among friends and it is a handicap to understand our history. We don't have this culture of sharing sentiments. There is definitely a gap between each of us and it is a pity. Out of the 40 students of my class, maybe only two know about my family's history and the death of my mother for instance.⁶¹

Disarray or self-denial

A third and final common reaction to history teaching observed is the negation of personal historicity and identity. Such a stance primarily concerned pupils of Hutu descent who had close relatives seemingly implicated as perpetrators of the genocide or, inversely, who had been victims of violence inflicted by the RPA. This attitude or coping strategy reveals extreme *disarray* regarding Rwanda's history and especially their own existence. This trend emerged when asking our interviewees to share the most important information concerning the history of their family. The answers offered by some 'Hutu descendants' displayed uncertain, anecdotal or very generic information.

⁵⁷ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 16-year-old.

⁵⁸ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 13-year-old.

⁵⁹ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 18-year-old.

⁶⁰ Interview, February 2012, Kigali, Saint André School, 16-year-old.

⁶¹ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 18-year-old.

I do not know much about my family's history.⁶²

[After a long hesitation] I would start with my maternal grandparents... They were orphans, met one day and decided to get married. My mother was born, then my grandmother passed away. My maternal grandfather is actually the one telling me the story of their marital life. I don't know much about my paternal grandfather.⁶³

I don't have much information. There are elements which I like and others which I don't, but I don't know how I can describe it to you.⁶⁴

[After avoiding the question twice] I would recommend not to discriminate anyone. We are all the same in this world... I would mention our ancestors who started our family.⁶⁵

Then, one student helped us understand better what appeared as a common feeling:

To understand history is a problem and stays as a problem. The exit way to deal with this is to forget about the clan and ethnic issue. This led us nowhere. It might perhaps even be good to forget the history itself with the time.⁶⁶

This strategy resembles the 'chosen amnesia' coined by Susanne Buckley-Zistel in reference to the concealment of disruptive events of the past.⁶⁷ The 'black-out' imposed by the Rwandan government on the massive killings perpetrated by the RPA is only one of many elements determining the narration of personal history by these youngsters. The Manichean and moralizing representation of the Genocide actors propagated by the authorities and parroted at school (Tutsi victims vs. Hutu perpetrators) contributes to a 'shattering of the self' as well.⁶⁸ These students find themselves – literally – with no words to recount their past. They are not simply silent about their ancestry, they also do not want to think about Rwanda's past and their personal background. They live in denial.

⁶² Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 18-year-old.

⁶³ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 17-year-old.

⁶⁴ Interview, June 2012, Nyanza, Saint Peter Igihozo, 14-year-old.

⁶⁵ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 21-year-old.

⁶⁶ Interview, May 2012, Nyakinama, Groupe scolaire Nyakinama 1, 20-year-old.

⁶⁷ BUCKLEY-ZISTEL, S., "Remembering to Forget...", *op. cit.*; BUCKLEY-ZISTEL, S., "We are Pretending Peace...", *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ UWIBEREYHO, R., "Evaluation of a community-based mental health model in post-genocide Rwanda", in COMMISSION NATIONALE DE LUTTE CONTRE LE GÉNOCIDE, *16 years after the Genocide perpetrated against Tutsi (1994-2010): Handling its consequences*, Kigali, CNLG, March 2011, pp. 113-129.

6. IDENTITIES IN PERDITION: A RISKY GAMBLE FOR THE FUTURE

Our findings evidence a rather troubling picture of the patterns of history education in contemporary Rwanda. The teacher-centered methods commonly used by the instructors reinforce the prescriptive character of the curricula and textbook content about the history of Rwanda. Deprived of any real opportunity to ‘speak’ the(ir) history, young people seems to give up on any intellectual effort and abstain from participating during the lessons. Almost unanimously, pupils express discontent about the incomplete (and flawed, according to many) national history taught at school.

The rare youngsters who dare to answer questions or express their opinions in the classrooms are ‘privileged’ ones who feel comfortable with the historiography rehearsed at school. The latter either corresponds to their own socio-history or is parroted opportunistically. Inversely, a majority of ‘struggling’ students whose personal experience and memories do not match the State narrative tend to keep a low profile.

Three coping strategies were identified to describe the students’ attitudes: self-censorship (silence); the development of disinterest or scepticism towards history (incredulity); and the negation of one’s own historicity and elements of identity (disarray). These strategies must not be seen as mutually exclusive; many of the students belonging to this category operate a mix of these mechanisms.

As evidenced throughout this article, the impossibility to speak one’s own history touches directly upon the question of identity. Adolescents who are descendants of Hutu with a socio-history that diverges massively from the official narrative presented at school try to repress their ancestors’ identities. Even more, many among them affirmed that they have higher trust in their teachers than in their parents to access the ‘truth’ about the past. These youngsters seem to give themselves a somehow new and securing existentiality by making theirs the policy, narratives and at times propaganda of the State. A conclusion can therefore be, for these students, that the process of eradicating ethnic identification and awareness has been successful. It could signal that the process of rooting out ‘mythico-histories’ shaping ethnic representations is on track.

But it may well be that the ‘Hutu descendants’ observing the speaking policy of the State – as well as other students – simply display ‘window dressing’, adopting an ‘ethics of dissimulation’⁶⁹ that hides entrenched and intimate representations and beliefs. Indeed, all the students who participated in the research presented themselves as Rwandans and identified with ‘being Rwandan’, as official policy requires. On the surface, they thus reject any

⁶⁹ INGELAERE, B., “Do We Understand Life...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-54.

Hutu or Tutsi affiliation or awareness. But for most of the students, 'being Rwandan' does not exclude an identification with Hutu or Tutsi ancestry. The latter is informed by their personal or family history. One can feel Rwandan today and at the same time recognize a Hutu or Tutsi historicity.

The findings presented in this article confirm what previous research on lived history (in relation to history education) documented: both 'Hutu-' and 'Tutsi descendants', and most present-day Rwandan youngsters, are forcible inheritors of conflicting meta-narratives on Rwanda's past. These narratives are, on the one hand, transmitted by the school system and, on the other, by their intimate network, alternative sources, or simply their personal (sometimes violent) experiences. Our analysis adds to previous insights the observation that 1) the diverging reception of the history teaching does not fully align with the ethnic divide; 2) a number of coping strategies are developed by the frustrated students toward the school teaching that are not mutually exclusive.

This article further demonstrates that conflict does not seem to be over in Rwanda, but is raging on at another level, as a meta-conflict: a conflict about the history and experience of the conflict.⁷⁰ The negation of this meta-conflict is precisely what prefigures potentially negative developments for the future. A democratization of memory is needed for democratic values to develop and, subsequently, democracy to take root.⁷¹ Hence, young people would need to engage in a transparent exchange of individual life stories, convictions or representations to access the dimension of reconciliation set *a minima* by Hannah Arendt, the capacity to foresee a "world in common"⁷². However, the current political context in Rwanda does not facilitate such an exchange, does not allow genuine dialogue and the emergence of empathy and understanding of diverging experiences. The students are made not to speak the(ir) history – even less their original identities – or express their views

⁷⁰ King also evokes 'mythico-histories' and a 'meta-conflict' in KING, E., "From Data Problems to Data Points...", *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134. On 'mythico-histories' and the link with ethnicity see also INGELAERE, B., "Peasants, Power and the Ethnicity. A Bottom-up Perspective on Rwanda's Transition", *African Affairs*, vol. 109, no. 435, 2010, pp. 273-292. The notion of 'meta-conflict' was initially coined by Horowitz in his study of South Africa: HOROWITZ, D., *A Democratic South Africa: Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*, Oakland, University of California Press, 1992. Lemarchand uses this notion in his analysis of the violent history of Burundi: LEMARCHAND, R., *Burundi. Ethnocide as discourse and practice*, Cambridge, Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1994. See also: INGELAERE, B., "The End of Colonial History and the Last Rwandan?", *Al Jazeera Magazine*, May 2014.

⁷¹ This line of argumentation is developed in NYIRUBUGURA, O., *Complexities and Dangers of Remembering and Forgetting in Rwanda*, Leiden, Sidestone Press, 2013.

⁷² According to Hannah Arendt, "a reconciliatory moment is not construed as a final shared understanding or convergence of world views, but as a disclosure of a world in common from diverse and possibly irreconcilable perspectives." (COLE, E. (ed.), *Teaching the Violent Past: History Education and Reconciliation*, Lanham/Boulder/New York/Toronto/ Plymouth, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007, p. 5).

freely. Only a minority of youngsters is legitimized to proclaim the ‘truth’ about history to the detriment of other excluded narrators. As a consequence, it is not an exaggeration to say that the present educational context in Rwanda is *de facto* undemocratic.

Such a reality prefigures a real danger for the cohesion of the Rwandan people. The superposition of a ‘privileged’/‘illegitimate’ duality *with regard to the Rwandans’ ownership over history* in addition to already established ones pertaining to Rwandan society – center/periphery, well-off/poor, Tutsi/Hutu... – can create an explosive cocktail. In present-day Rwanda, as several Rwandans themselves state⁷³, reconciliation must be *thought* not only between Hutu and Tutsi, but between all citizens and their government. The latter also implies, as this article demonstrates, the need to reconcile the past and the present as well as ‘lived history’ and ‘official historiography’.

Fribourg and New Haven, May 2014

⁷³ GASANA, J., *Rwanda: du parti-État à l’État-garnison*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2002; SEBARENZI J., *God Sleeps in Rwanda: A Journey of Transformation*, New York, Atria Books, 2009.

