

2007 Scott Kloeck-Jenson Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant Report

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In June and July 2007, I conducted preliminary dissertation research in Rwanda for my doctoral program in political science. My intention in making this trip was to gain a greater understanding of the current status of the reconciliation process in Rwanda. Specifically, I am interested in how the actions of the present Rwandan government towards suppressing the use of ethnic identity labels have permeated Rwandan society and the shaping of what it means to be 'Rwandan,' as realized through the state's reconciliation programs. Such information provides an empirically-grounded understanding of developments made in the country 13 years after a genocide in which approximately 800,000 people were killed.

I was based in Kigali while in Rwanda. Situating myself in the capital had many advantages, including close proximity to government offices while working to obtain my research permits. In addition, most local and international civil rights NGOs have their main offices in the capital city, making it logistically easier to persist in arranging appointments with researchers and directors of these organizations.

Conducting research on *gacaca* trials, genocide memorial sites, and TIG sites¹ required permission from different government agencies. After acquiring these credentials, I attended a *gacaca* trial in Butare (located in the South province) with a dean at the National University of Rwanda. The gentleman translated the eight-hour long proceeding from Kinyarwanda to French and explained the court's actions. This experience allowed me to see firsthand how Rwandans speak of the events of 1994 in a public forum towards the ends of attaining 'justice' and 'truth.' Though there is a decided effort to not speak of (or think of, it seems) fellow Rwandans in terms of 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi,' the *gacaca* process cannot function without recognition and usage of these identity labels. These observations helped to inform my interview with the head of the *Avocats Sans Frontières* in Rwanda.

Part of the government's reconciliation program includes preserving memory² includes the preservation of genocide sites as memorials, as well as the creation of structures (including statues) at such sites. This program is implemented by Ibuka, an organization committed to the preservation of the genocide. During my time in Rwanda, I visited eight memorials. After speaking with people in the communities near the memorials, who described the events that happened at particular sites and plans for future development of the sites, I spoke with a representative of Ibuka. From this interview, I learned that the survivors' organization is strongly connected to the Rwandan government, as it consults on activities of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, as the organization asserts that remembering events of the genocide is necessary for reconciliation. I encountered representatives of Ibuka two weeks later at a conference addressing mechanisms to counter the negationism of the Tutsi genocide. The conference memo on the topic helped to corroborate that there is a distinct effort towards the shaping of Rwandan memory of the genocide, prioritizing the deaths of Tutsis and the misdoings of Hutus and excluding elements that counter this narrative.

¹ TIG is an acronym for *les travaux pour les intérêts généraux*. These are sites where prisoners who have confessed to their participation in the genocide are sent to serve 'community service' to the country through hard labor. Included among the work done in these camps includes constructing homes for families who survived the genocide and shaping large stones into bricks to be purchased for or used in construction projects. TIG sites are one variation of *ingando*, a program for educating different populations of the history and civics of Rwanda.

² It should be noted that the 'memory' that is preserved at genocide memorial sites and by Ibuka is one that is approved of by the current government and does not, therefore, draw attention to any responsibility that members of the current administration may have for summary executions of unconfirmed genocide participants in 1994.

A third element of the government's work towards reconciliation is that of *ingando* camps. *Ingandos* are designed for specific groups of people, including those for university students, ex-combatants, and prisoners who have confessed to participating in the genocide. With the guidance of a research assistant, I selected three *ingando* sites for prisoners (TIG sites) and requested permission to conduct interviews with TIG participants and members of each site's coordination team. Interviews conducted at each site range from two to six, for a total of twelve amongst both prisoners and camp coordination members. The interview experiences at these camps were informative in both gaining information of how these sites are managed, what happens on a daily basis in the camps, how prisoners think of their placement in the TIG sites, and prisoner expectations for their lives after completing their sentences. What was perhaps most stunning was the high regard that many of the interviewees had for President Kagame's government, along with their strong assertions that they had changed their ideas while in TIG, claiming that all people in Rwanda were all the same (i.e. that they were all Rwandans.) Additionally, my conversation with representatives of RCN (Réseau de Citoyens) on their extended research project on *ingando*/TIG sites provided greater nuance to my interview observations. While all but one of the prisoners that I had spoken with had very high expectations for their return to their families and villages, Christel Drapier (the primary research coordinator) conveyed a different sense. Drapier said that many of the men that she spoke with in TIG sites were much more concerned for how they would provide for their families, an impression similar to that I that one prisoner conveyed.

In addition to these activities, I spoke with representatives of LIPRODHOR, IRDP, IRC, and the National University of Rwanda, as well as collected available published materials on the topic of reconciliation. Importantly, I spoke with as many Rwandans not connected to these organizations as I could, in order to better gauge the realities of living in the post-conflict environment fostered by the Rwandan government. It was harrowing to hear one of my friends say that she continues to see the genocide every day. Clearly, she is still suffering from the trauma of the genocide. While she uses the identity language of 'Rwandan,' she continues to harbor distinctions between perpetrators and survivors. This example allows one to question the objective in speaking only in terms of 'Rwandan' and how this limiting of language may be contributing to the concealment of intrasocietal divisions, rather than openly addressing people's real reactions.

This research experience has been fruitful in innumerable ways. Although I have spent a number of years researching the situation in Rwanda, there is no substitute for speaking with individuals who not only work in the realm of reconciliation, but whose lives are impacted by the government's decrees. My time in Rwanda has led to a more nuanced understanding the complexities of the post-conflict society. While Rwandans need to move past the events of the genocide, and while they continue to do so, there are parts of Rwandan history that are not openly permitted. Although it appears that the government is effectively silencing its opposition and convincing members of the population of the correct memory that should be remembered, there is a great deal of suffering on the parts of survivors and perpetrators (and their families) that is being quashed. Such insight would have been difficult to garner without on-the-ground experience. Additionally, as this was my first foray into the field with my own research agenda, I learned a number of invaluable project management skills, including how to navigate the Rwandan bureaucracy, the best way to gain access to organizations, and how to be flexible when the pre-planned project goals are not easily achieved. These skills would not have been possible without the generous support of Global Studies and the Jenson family, to whom I am extremely thankful for this opportunity.