

Rebels, Rulers, and Refugees: Post-Conflict Governments in Action in Burundi

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I have worked in the Great Lakes region for the past four years and have spent the past three summers in the Central African nation of Burundi. The country is frequently listed as the world's poorest, and recently ended its decades-old civil war (1993-2009). The time spent here has allowed me to witness Burundi's transition to democracy firsthand.

Burundi embarked on its second set of democratic elections following negotiations between numerous rebel factions and the military in 2005. Contacts I made on a trip in 2008, funded by the Center for African Studies, allowed me to participate in these elections personally. I acted as an international observer for COSOME (la coalition de la société civile pour le observation et le monitoring des elections) as a side project while conducting research for my dissertation. While this work was tremendously illuminating regarding the election and the political tension surrounding it--there were serious questions as to how many participants would ultimately play a part in the five-election cycle--my project focuses on the party in power on a grander scale. My thesis focuses on the changes from rebel movement to state government following civil wars, and specifically, the ruling CNDD-FDD (Council Nationale pour la defense de la democratie-Force du defense de la democratie).

Research in the social sciences has just begun to delve deeper into the inner workings, organizations, and structures of rebel movements, or to put it simply, what makes them "tick." I gathered preliminary evidence on the formation and development of the movement, interviewing participants from those who joined the rebellion early and as foot-soldiers, to politicians who joined



during peace talks in the early 2000s. It was fascinating to be able to gather data on this murky topic and to trace the political infancy and adolescence of the movement. During this summer trip, I conducted 47 interviews, with plans to conduct approximately 300 more over this academic year while in Burundi on a Fulbright-Hays fellowship.

My ability to conduct interviews is due in part to my study under the University of Florida's Center for African Studies Title VI language programs. I studied four years of Kiswahili, the lingua franca of East Africa and one of the official languages of the East African Community (of which Burundi has been a member since 2007). Because of the influence of Swahili traders along Lake Tanganyika and porous borders with Tanzania and East Congo, a fair number of Burundians speak Kiswahili, especially former rebels, who often spent large periods of time as refugees in Tanzania,

Congo, or Kenya. This skill has been especially useful in "breaking the ice" with notoriously wary Burundians and has contributed to a more fruitful research experience. I look forward to enhancing these skills on many return fieldwork trips to Burundi and the Great Lakes and hope that the skills I developed through working with the Center for African Studies can add to the larger body of knowledge on the region.

Cara E. Jones is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Political Science. She has received research funding from the Dept. of Political Science and is a 2010 recipient of a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad award. She was also a FLAS fellow for Swahili (2006-2008).