

Giving Up the Gun: Life Post-Rebellion in Central Africa

CARA JONES

As a Fulbright-Hays DDRA awardee, I spent most of 2010-2011 living in central Burundi, conducting field research for my dissertation entitled “Giving up the Gun: Rebel to State Transformations in Africa’s Great Lakes.” While there I conducted over 400 interviews with former rebels, current government officials, and civilians who all played a part in Burundi’s civil war, which lasted (officially) from 1993-2005. The conflict was devastating to all involved, culminating in the displacement of 2 million Burundians, both internal and external refugees, and the deaths of more than 300,000. My research focuses on understanding how the rebels that now hold majority political power, the CNDD-FDD (in French, *Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*) have transformed themselves from rag-tag soldiers waging an insurgency in the forests to the keepers of national economic, political and social power.

During my time there, I saw the regime under former rebel commander and now President Pierre Nkurunziza win its second election since the war, a move that consolidated their political power, but also spawned interesting new research issues for my work. Although people largely accepted the victory of the CNDD-FDD in the 2010 elections, the fire that electrified their 2005 victory was put out, and replaced with significant post-election violence. People were no longer willing to accept politicians who were unwilling to engage in dialogue with those not of their party. Average citizens expressed their discontent to me in a number of ways, and I



learned of their views by employing a variety of field methods. I conducted interviews, larger focus groups, and was a participant observer in community, church and associational meetings. I also interviewed former rebel foot-soldiers - men and women who had participated as fighters, sometimes when they were children - as to how and why the movement progressed the way it did. I also questioned them about why they joined, why they continued to participate, and what they did after they left the movement.

Over the year in the field, I learned about rebels and rebellion by employing an interdisciplinary lens to my work, that not only included the application of political and economic theories of grievance from my training in the department of political science, but also in anthropological and historical ways of seeing that I was trained in through various courses, interactions and seminars in the Center for African Studies. During my fieldwork, I also utilized my language skills, especially in Swahili, which I learned as a FLAS fellow in the Center for African Studies during my first two years of

graduate school. While my Kiswahili ‘Walimu’ (teachers) at Florida might now have trouble with my dialect (the Burundian version is slightly different than the Standard, tinged with French and Kirundi influences), I know that the depth of my work would not have been possible without it. Often times, the fact that I spoke regional languages made the difference in the level of trust, and therefore, level of information, I received from interviewees. It was also a great way to understand when people were discussing you in a nightclub or restaurant. I was also lucky enough to have had the full support of the Center as I prepared for the dissertation research in my graduate school years I received numerous grants to conduct pre-dissertation research trips and present my findings at disciplinary and area studies conferences.

Cara E. Jones is a Ph.D. Candidate in political science and a former FLAS fellow (Swahili, 2006-2008). Funding for her field research provided by a U.S. Department of Education Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad grant.