

Prospects for Peace and Transition in Post-Conflict Burundi

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As a doctoral student in comparative political science, I have been studying the region of the Great Lakes in Central Africa for the past five years. Through the generous support of the Center for African Studies, in the summer of 2008 I was finally able to carry out a pre-dissertation research trip to the region, and specifically to the very understudied country of Burundi, where I plan to carry out my dissertation research.

I was in Burundi in May-June, coinciding with a number of exciting and important developments in the post-conflict political situation of the country. While Burundi's history has received less attention than that of neighboring Rwanda, where genocide killed perhaps one million people in 1994, Burundi in fact is also just emerging from a prolonged conflict along ethnic lines. My research trip gave me the opportunity to participate in meetings with several high-ranking opposition party leaders, helping me to better understand the challenges

facing ethnically divided societies and the difficult political solutions to these problems. I was also able, in this initial trip, to interview leading members of the government, including various ministers and even the president of the country! These connections were facilitated by the support of both the Center and the numerous faculty affiliates from many departments connected to the Center, most notably my dissertation advisors Rene Lemarchand, Leonardo Villalón and Benjamin Smith (Political Science), who tirelessly support students in time, effort, contacts and information.



I was grateful for the experience of being able to go into the field so early in my Ph.D. studies and to utilize the language training I received as a Center for African Studies FLAS fellow in Kiswahili so as to increase my speaking and comprehension capabilities. This previous language training also gave me a distinct advantage over other expatriate researchers whom I met there, as Kiswahili is more widely used in the impoverished areas of the capital city of Bujumbura, as well as in the communities of returned refugees who once lived in Tanzania or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, all groups that have been underrepresented in scholarship on political violence in Burundi.

This summer research helped to solidify my interest in studying Burundi, focused my attention on specific ground-level situations and current contexts that will be crucial to understand in carrying out dissertation-level research, and provided me with the knowledge needed to better prepare myself for sharpening the focus of my dissertation in writing a prospectus and applying for grants to support dissertation fieldwork.

Cara Hauck is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science. She was a Center for African Studies FLAS fellow in 2006-07 and 2007-08. Her summer 2008 research was supported by a CAS pre-dissertation travel award. Following her research in Burundi, she was also a fellow in the Fulbright-Hays Groups Project Abroad (GPA) Advanced Intensive Swahili program in Tanzania in summer 2008.

