

Transcriptions From the Rwanda/Uganda Community Journal

Friday 18, June, Kigali

At the genocide memorial museum, I am struck by how terribly unfortunate that such a word needed to be invented in the first place.

“Mbere ya Jenocide” = before the Genocide, one of the headings in the exhibit. Which makes me realize the Kinyarwandan word for it was derived from the English- prior to all this there was no need for such a word in the vocabulary of a nation. Then something happened that necessitated its naming, and now to most of the world, Rwanda and genocide are synonymous.

(Yet) there is a calm, even in the bustling of city life and construction, in this place. People are friendly, smiling running up to us in our bus. Its as if the history got so overwhelmingly large that it didn't have room in the country anymore; there was no longer a space of means of talking about it. Our guide today made several references to the “war” that happened.

Sunday June 20th Butare

Moments that stood out yesterday (I had to save this entry for the morning in an effort to salvage some sleep. The night before I dreamed of a Brooklyn genocide, at viewed from the front window of a large van. One body in particular kept rocking and rocking its way out of life...):

The conversation of survivor vs. victim and the idea that a victim is still in the midst of the (ruin(?), possibly without hope from far away. As a survivor has been a victim, to some extent is always a victim and yet is looking forward, not backward, and absolutely loves hope.

Also love the introduction of yoga as a healing method.

June 20th 2010

The Kings House:

Journeyed from Butare to Nyanza to experience the king's house- a functional museum of 15 centuries of Rwanda's history laid out in brief. The expansive rich histories and narratives of “pre-colonial” Rwanda struck me. The politicized interplay of language (regional) and conquest foregrounded the Rwanda we see today. Particular point of interest came with the reign of Mutara Rudahigwa.

-His interactions with Catholicism – faith in juxtaposition with the institutionalized church.

-His early and untimely death at 28 years old – 1959 and the subsequent genocide to follow just a few years later.

Art Gallery- @ Nyanza

Themes are explored each year at a national level. Visual artists contribute their best take on its meaning. These artists get it. They don't say it all, but they say it right. “Never forget, nor (re) member” will remain with me as a challenge to find the balance between addressing trauma and breathing properly. It seemed the collection was a cross between hope and habitude. Much of the art carried abstractions of hope, but also concrete examples in portrayals of the quotidian. This is art as a balm, art to live.

Mpanga Prison:

This place blindsided me with a new and unexpected charge. Locating Hope in time. We were invited into the prison as guests. We observed a football match or rather observed prisoners in pink and orange as they observed a football match. We got an overview of the facility from Gerald Ntarugera- Prison Director. He opened the entire facility up to us. We saw and witnessed the special wing for prisoners that had committed international war crimes. The prisoners from Sierra Leone seemed to be living quite well. The bureaucracy of it all was incredible.

Of the 7422 prisoners at Mpanga over 6,600 are imprisoned for war crimes relating to the genocide. Upon entering the courtyard of the male wing, we were met by thousands of wide-eyed attentive men, I personally felt torn between seeing a sea of pink and orange suits and actively regarding the individual alert faces of the prisoners. They were so perfectly present for us to enter, that I couldn't help but meet them where there were.

June 21st 2010

We started the day early with a delicious breakfast and walked to the offices of the national commission for the fight against Genocide. Erik gave introducing remarks, giving a background of who we are, our purpose of being in Rwanda, the different countries represented and he called upon Jean Pierre Karegeya to introduce one of the speakers for the say, Mr. George Bigyen, who was representing CNLG, he is the legal officer of CNLG.

What is the role of commission?

By Bigyen George

To prevent and fight against genocide

Background:

It was created in 2007 but started functioning in 2008. The objective was to fight against genocide, to prevent genocide and genocide ideologies.

The commission has 3 organs:

Organ one: the executive secretary:

The second organ of the commission is **finance**- this is in charge of finances.

The third organ is the advisory council.

JP Karegeya, gave an overview of what IGSC is- he said that the organization has 42 member countries as well as a library. He mentioned that the library came about as a result of IGSC's Collaboration with the California Institute of the Arts (CALARTS). He mentioned that the organization has programs with a number of universities from that US and that his relationship with Erik Ehn has facilitated some of the collaborations and relationships with some of the USA universities, in particular CALARTS and Brown University. He said that the IGSC libraries function is to facilitate creative writing. He also mentioned that IGSC organizes conferences, summer studies programs as well as to help people understand the Tutsi genocide. He said that this year's topic is "Genocide and Reconstruction of Rwanda"

Erik then invited some group members to share with everybody what led them to make this trip to Rwanda and the Afghanistan team shared the following with the team; Theatre is considered probably the most effective tool to deal with trauma and violence.

They use both conventional theatre and participatory theatre methodologies
The objective is to create space for people to be together, for people to tell their stories by employing “playback methodology” for the purposes of truth telling and documentation. In 2009, they formed an organization “ Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization.”

They mentioned that it took long to be registered because the Afghan authorities were not accepting the names the organization founders had come up with for the organization. The members from Afghanistan expressed their joy for being in Rwanda and sharing their experiences with the Rwandan Counterparts.

MASHIRIKA AFRICA:

There were six members from Mashirika Africa. Hope Azeda, the artistic director of the group gave a brief description of the kind of work that Mashirika does. She said that the government of Rwanda asked her to create a performance piece that would be one of the activities to commemorate 10 years of the 1994 genocide. They created a piece- Rwanda My Hope. She said that it was the first time Rwanda was using theatre to talk about genocide- the piece has gone on to tour the rest of the World. Since then the government of Rwanda has continued to work with Mashirika and commissioned two other pieces that have since been performed at subsequent genocide commemorations.

Singapore:

Michelle (Brown University/Singapore)

Overview of Rwanda History- By Senator Prof Jose Kabago

Prof. Jose Kabago is a professor of history. He taught in France, he has also visited and taught in universities in the US. He presented the history of Rwanda by dividing it into two parts; ancient history and colonial history.

Ancient History:

Rwanda political history started in 12th and 13th century. It started as a small kingdom named Gasabo near lake Muhazi. It became a state with Gahingirwa king in 16th century when different arms of governance were introduced i.e. the police, the army and the administrative. At that time the regime was military and to make the army every family had to send a son and the army was called “Army of Rwandans” As the army conquered other kingdoms. The boundaries of Rwanda kept changing and Kinyarwanda language spread. Rwanda’s social structure had a high mobility. One of the major advantages that Rwanda and Burundi had as the fact that they are monolingual states. This particular fact helped Rwanda to be homogeneous for 4 centuries. One of the things in the administration that contributed to its homogenous nature was a system known as “ubuhake” – This is the system where every Rwandan had to have a client. The client could be paid in terms of property. This system had an element of cohesion.

Colonialism:

In the 19th century the first Europeans came to Rwanda. These were first referred to as the “white fathers” largely because of the kind of dresses they had, since they traveled to Rwanda from North Africa with the purpose of spreading Catholicism. They had not been successful in North Africa to spread their gospel. Also it was very hot and they did away with their black clothes for white ones to manage the heat. At the time they traveled to Rwanda. The British were also traveling East and North Africa in search of the source of the Nile.

When the white fathers arrived in Rwanda, they were fascinated by Rwanda's system of governance, the hierarchy, the centralized system. More so, there was an initiation ritual where when a child would be initiated the ritual was that they would touch the child's forehead to mean that-----, the child's chest would also be touched and the words said would be "may your heart rest in Rwanda" and finally they would touch the child's shoulders saying; "may your enemies fall off your shoulders" when the catholic fathers saw all of these, they came to the conclusion that the Rwandan king and lineage at that time must have had a connection with Abyssinia. Therefore Europe and that whole initiation ritual had a connection to the Catholicism ritual of prayer. "In the name of the father..." The first Europeans to colonize Rwanda were Germans. Rwanda was put under Tanganyika colony. After WW1, Germany lost Rwanda to the Belgians. Belgium instructed their missionaries to educate people and also find those who had come from the "Nile".

Under the Belgium rule, the following happened:

They got Tutsi children and put them in schools because the Belgians believed that Tutsis were more intelligent.

They believed that Tutsi's were born to govern; they therefore wanted them for indirect rule.

They got the Hutus to join seminaries and teaching institutions because they considered them submissive, adaptable. Agreeable, and not as intelligent as Tutsis

In the mid 20th century the Belgians racialized these classes.

Identity cards were issued.

Ethnicity became the "Rwandan History" prof. Kabago gave an example of one of his students who after weeks of classes in Rwandan history, who wondered when they would start learning the "real" history that talked about ethnicity.

Based on their own experiences back home, the Belgians confused the classes in Rwanda to be races. For example, to them the Hutus were like the Flemish in Belgium and the Tutsis were like the Walloon.

They believed that the Hutus and the Flemish were both hard workers, believers and have been oppressed by a minority group.

These things were taught to the Hutus.

In the late 1950s when Africa was demanding Independence from their colonial masters, Rwanda was among them.

In 1957 Belgium helped the Hutu write a manifesto (HUTU MANIFESTO) and it included the following:

No blood relationship between Hutu and Tutsi

Hutu wanted to be free from Tutsis

Hutus were the original Rwandans, Tutsis were newcomers and therefore had to keep their place of leave and go back to where they came from.

In 1959 a Hutu political party was created. During the 1959 Tutsi massacre, the Belgians helped the Hutu to carry it out. A contingent army was brought in from the Congo.

Discrimination became a system of government.

With the creation of PERHUTU (the emancipation of the Hutu) political party, the massacres and exiles by the Tutsi and the emphasis on the "new man; Rwanda's ancient history was gone. The Hutus teachings were about "cutting off oneself from the pas.

The first regime after independence was a civilian one. However, that didn't last because the Belgians went ahead to make divisions even among the Hutus based on the regions where they come from. In 1973 there was a *coop d'etat*.

June 22, 2010

“Send the Tutsis back to Ethiopia, where they came from.”

We drove just south of Kigali to the Nyabarongo River, which flows into the Akagera River, eventually making its way to Lake Victoria. During the genocide, bodies were thrown into this fast flowing river, an “easy solution” to the problem of disposal. Tom our guide and a long time journalist in Rwanda, tells us that the muddy brown waters were once coursing with bodies, flowing north towards the Nile. Genocidal ideology- river ideology- bestows upon this river the power to send the Tutsis “back” to Ethiopia, up the Nile, where they “originated” according to colonial myth. Our time at the river is marked by silence. It flows steadily, a strong, thick swath of water, now only providing transport for a few branches of grass, stray pieces of wood.

“Legend goes that the fish in Lake Victoria were getting fat after 1994.”

Back at IGSC, senator Antoine Mugasera spoke to us about the development and evolution of Anti-Tutsi racism that climaxed with the 1994 genocide (which arguably began in 1959, with the Tutsi massacres, or even earlier. 1994 was not an isolated event, not an EXCEPTIONAL situation) his lecture felt very familiar, which is a good thing: we are internalizing the idea that Hutu and Tutsi are strategically constructed identities, inextricably linked to colonial motivations, power and the concept of “originating” somewhere versus being an outsider. Though massacres of Tutsis began in 1959, the government run media made sure to suppress this information. Much of the Rwandan population was unaware of what was going on, as with the rest of the world. The senator described how some visiting professor from other countries would witness and write about the anti-Tutsi violence back home. French press and Ugandan newspaper also documented some of the violence, however no action was taken, on any one's part to intervene. The anti-Tutsi ideology increased in intensity in the decades leading to the genocide, manifesting itself through quota systems, forced exile, massacres, false arrests, and complete disempowerment, socially politically and economically. When the plane went down in April 1994, the genociders responded to the signal and began executing the plan that had been building over years.

Later in the day, we heard from a professor who talked about how Uganda has memorialized the Rwandan Genocide, considering that thousands of bodies have been relocated and consolidated. What are the ethics of this? It feels too efficient, too dehumanized, to transport and transplant bodies years and years after they have been buried. The politics of memorialization—what is ethical? What feels just and appropriate? We've seen a number of types of memorials, and each permits a unique kind of remembrance and grief. This professor wasn't too interested in answering our question, directly, but we did touch on some interesting points. Or rather, more questions. How does memory + memorialization affect/connect with perpetrators/ families of perpetrators? How do we prove intent? How do we create an inclusive definition of the word Genocide? To what extent does the legal vocabulary really define and explain

history? Does the “international community” have an obligation to intervene in conflicts--is there a line that can be drawn? How do people maintain faith in the church, or in God after the church’s participation in the genocide? Or after Genocide at all?

Finally we visited AVEGA, a support organization for women who were widowed as a result of the genocide. Originally founded by a group of 50 widows, AVEGA has grown to include 25000 women and offers health services, therapy, income generation assistance and advocacy assistance. The work they do is far-reaching and transformative, and they also collaborate with other NGOs that contribute to their needs and strengthen their impact.

June 23, 2010

Visited the US embassy- overall, a lackluster, fairly generic, and predictable conversation.

Other recurring themes:

Finding God → where? In religion?

In conversation?

Forgiveness

Hope

The size and scope of faith/love

A country rebuilding itself

Kagame – visionary, but ruthless?

The Rwandan model of reconciliation

Is art what is needed to access the greatest number? Is that the goal?

Where to devote our time/resources.

How to be useful

How the language of genocide changes

How conversations about genocide change

How memory changes

Legality/justice

American conceptions of justice/vs. other

Who/what is the “international community”

June 24, 2010

We just had a mini circle on the garden of the Center Christus, after visiting the Nyamata memorial at the church. The gate of the church had been destroyed by grenades that also had taken out pools of concrete, leaving craters behind. In the church the muddied clothes of victims were folded in piles on the benches. There were bullet holes like stars in the tin roof that was nothing like a sky, galaxies in the dim building. Orange brown stains were still perceptible on the simple concrete walls. We also saw the tomb where the Italian Nun had been buried; killed by the Habyarimana’s man for alerting the international community about the fate of the Tutsis as early as 1992, after she had fed and protected them. There was a burial ground at the back with coffins and skulls in a tiny narrow basement.

Earlier today we went to the Supreme Court and met with the head of Genocide Fugitives Tracking Unit (GFTU) Jean Boscomutangana. We went about the judiciary system in Rwanda that had to be largely modified after the genocide and how it had evolved and

improved with the entire prosecution department how being legally trained as opposed to previously such as during the Gaccaca trials where the judges were laymen who had no professional legal training. Also, we learned about how the genocide fugitives tracking was receiving great cooperation from European countries but having far more difficulty being implemented in African countries due to

- a.) Either public/foreign relations (the Congo)
- b.) To corruption
- c.) Poverty – insufficient man power to investigate

This idea of rapid evolution of the judicial system due to the genocide was echoed in the talk before we went to the Supreme Court by Dr. Jean Pierre Dusingize Mungu professor in psychology Butare. He had given a talk about trauma and healing that covered the basics of what types the country was suffering from on a personal and national level, on both the victims and the perpetrator side. He mentioned that there had only been psychologists in Rwanda in 1995 where as how there was a psychiatric hospital at the NUR that psychologists/ training counselors had been expanding exponentially in number. Similar to the almost explosive growth that we've seen in Kigali, in terms of buildings and construction and ambition (laptops for every child by 2020!) I felt that many of the social and political mechanisms of a country had been forced to push forward rapidly in an attempt to adapt to the clamoring voracious needs created by the genocide.

Another interesting point of the Trauma healing talk was the response that yes, traditional, cultural elements were crucial to the recovery process, in response to a question from the group. These included dance. Mode of burial, and speeches/closing words during the burial, the Gaccaca etc.

June 25, 2010

How does one balance art/exploitation → maybe there is always exploitation
Issue of CONSENT

June 26, 2010

To be short, this trip and its many more gatherings to come is both the conceptualization and performative enactment of Wiener's thought. In Rwanda this summer, multiple peoples, bodies, disciplines united from all over the world to the continent of Africa. We gathered for two weeks collectively growing, moving and dispersing to finally return by Lorraine, full circle; but as predicted awakened, seen, complexed, spiritually (re) imagined and conceptualized. Thus changed.

AR. Last entre in Rwanda

UGANDA

Travel Day to Kampala Ndere Center

Uganda to Masindi

We arrived in Masindi at 2:30 pm.

After thanks of Masindi people from us and short introductions, we choosed our room.

At 6pm we had Teatime. Some of our group members played football and other had some meetings.

At 7pm Masindi people killed a goat for our dinner

At 8pm-11pm they cooked Kabob for us and organized very nice Indigenous music and dance party.

Un arc pour les enfants

Monday 5th July 2010

We quaffed tea and Nescafe and gathered under the tallest tree to watch Phillips play, the inaugural project of the Hope North Drama Club.

The enthusiastic troupe tackled the topic of HIV/AIDS with humor and aplomb. Violetta and Alexandria lent a hand with translations and bringing the plays different actors together. The students delved through disease and death but left their peer audience smiling at the end. The darkness is light enough.

Roberto, Violetta and Salim hopped into one bus and the rest of us sprawled out in the now spacious mini bus. Their departure made a sizable impact on the group and our shrinking circle, and they shall be missed over the last few days in Uganda.

@ A River Blue

The school and its dance, drama, music programs impressed us all. The rehabilitation of Flavia, a model student who has gone through horrific experiences, was particularly striking. Many students (the majority of whom are female and the most vulnerable, are supported financially) have young children. There is no daycare, so classes can be a bit chaotic with younger voices chiming in.

We walked together through the village up a local mount (a pump with water barrels on top, sitting defunct since the pump motor was stolen a year ago.) and looked out over the plains that housed thousands of tents and camps only a few years ago. There was an uneasy mix of Ugandan Army and LRA soldiers in conflict over the civilians of the area. George relays stories of being kicked out of his house by LRA troops, and discovering a weapons cache in the backyard upon his return. He says it marks the beginning of peace and plans to make the space a monument.

We ate with students and staff, discovered the LRA graffiti in the classrooms of A River Blue, and shared stories of our own work and experiences in Uganda. There is a remarkable energy, enthusiasm and organization to A River Blue's approach, and a resurgent sense of community to the village. Much to learn from.

Briefly, Tuesday 6th July...

We climbed Obim Rock with George and a few people from the surrounding town. Boggling to think that it housed 15-20 people during the LRA campaigns between 2003-2005. The stone circles and occasional patches of charred rock bare witness to the lives that endured here. The one entrance was protected by the army, food supplies were collected from a nearby school and required army accompaniment to collect.

An hour later, we were back on the road in search of Abayunda, the Jewish community approaching its 100th anniversary. We reached it around dusk, settling into a warm, unforgettable and kind reception. The sunset over a vast plateau and mount Elgon was just sublime.

