

Book Review

Becoming Rwandan: Education, reconciliation, and the making of a post-genocide citizen by S. Garnett Russell
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In *Becoming Rwandan: Education, reconciliation, and the making of a post-genocide citizen*, S. Garnett Russell (2020) draws on data collected from surveys, analyses of policy documents, curriculum and textbooks, observations in schools, and interviews with students, teachers, government officials, educational policymakers, and academics to present an insightful examination of how the Rwandan government's intended educational policies, designed to create peace and reconciliation in the post-genocide period, are implemented on the ground in local contexts. Russell provides a convincing argument that while the Rwandan government uses global discourses of human rights and peacebuilding in its educational policies and curricula, as local actors, both teachers and students interact with these discourses in ways that alter the aims of the government, leading to unintentional outcomes and compromising long-term peacebuilding efforts. She utilizes the concept of "decoupling" from sociological literature to describe what happens when national-level educational policies and local practices do not align. Through her argument, she shows that the Rwandan government carefully selects global models of human rights, peace, and justice to maintain legitimacy on the world stage, while silencing the controversial nature of certain topics, namely ethnicity and its link to the 1994 genocide. However, as Russell's book demonstrates through an interweaving of rich data from ethnographic observations, interviews, and survey results, teachers and students are active actors with agency, who through their engagement with these global discourses, challenge and interpret them in their own ways. Her argument conveys the strengths and weaknesses in using education for peacebuilding and nation-building processes in post-conflict contexts.

Following an introduction to the study and the theoretical concept of "decoupling" (chapter 1) as well as a thorough discussion of the global increase in judicial and nonjudicial mechanisms in post-conflict societies and using examples from South Africa, Sierra Leone, Peru, and Guatemala (chapter 2), Russell presents a review of the mechanisms intended to bring peace, transitional justice, and reconciliation to Rwanda, including within the education system. She then turns to her argument that despite the Rwandan government's attempts at peacebuilding via these educational mechanisms, national policy efforts rarely align with local realities. The remainder of the book (chapters 3-5) is dedicated to supporting her argument through an in-depth analysis of survey and ethnographic data collected in the capital city of Kigali, a Western province, and an Eastern province in Rwanda. She closes (chapter 6) with a reflection on the possibilities and limits of using education for peacebuilding in Rwanda and beyond.

The combination of Russell's interdisciplinary approach and variety of methodologies used to conduct the research are essential to the merits of the book. In addition to analyzing national policy documents and curricular materials, Russell spent eleven months in three regions of Rwanda collecting data from a total of fifteen varied secondary schools in the form of surveys, observations, and an impressive number of interviews with individuals from multiple levels of Rwanda's education system. Collecting data across these different regions and schools allows her to paint a rich picture of the diversity present in the perspectives of teachers and students towards human rights, citizenship, and peace and reconciliation in Rwanda. The depth of Russell's findings presented in chapters 3 through 5 might easily overwhelm the reader; however, her skillful use of historical and theoretical literature alongside the analysis of her data throughout the book helps to guide the reader towards understanding her main points. The outcome is a smoothly written blend of Rwandan history, peacebuilding and transitional justice literature, sociological theory, and the voices and experiences of her research participants.

In chapter 3, Russell describes how the Rwandan post-genocide state utilizes the education system to create a new civic identity intended to generate peace and reconciliation. Throughout this and the subsequent chapters, she peppers her analysis with data from interviews and surveys, even including bar graphs as helpful visualizations of key statistical results from her study. Using data from surveys and interviews with students and teachers, coupled with her analysis of curriculum and policy documents, she shows that schools in Rwanda are used by the state to shape this new identity: a nonethnic Rwandan who is able to converse in English, is devoted to the new Rwandan nation, and has an international outlook. However, her research demonstrates that despite the government's success at creating a patriotic citizen with a global mindset, its attempts at de-ethnicizing identity through education have been limited as students continue to engage with ethnic identity through their distinct languages, family experiences with the genocide, and interactions with others.

In chapter 4, Russell discusses the Rwandan state's use of human rights discourses for peacebuilding and to maintain legitimacy in the international sphere. Through her analysis of educational policy documents, Russell demonstrates that the Rwandan government carefully selects particular human rights discourses—especially those focused on gender equality and the rights of children—while silencing others, in an effort to foster peacebuilding and reconciliation, garner financial support from international agencies, and portray itself to the world community as dedicated to improving human rights. Yet, as her robust data analysis shows, teachers and students take up the issue of human rights differently at the local school level, oftentimes avoiding sensitive topics and discussing human rights more conceptually. The ways that students and teachers interpret human rights is most clearly demonstrated in Russell's keen observations of class discussions wherein they are alluded to as being the important fundamental needs of all people yet there is no direct connection made to Rwandan lives. Russell concludes that the inability of teachers and students to fully engage with the human rights violations of the past not only limits students' development of critical thinking and active learning skills, but also limits peacebuilding in post-conflict Rwanda.

In chapter 5, Russell further explores how the Rwandan state utilizes education to remember the genocide and promote peace. She argues that although the national curriculum in Rwanda presents students with a single narrative which is structured to avoid discussion of ethnicity, the memories of individuals and their families, which contrast with this narrative, complicate efforts for peacebuilding. These complications are most evident in Russell's discussions with Rwandan teachers who describe the need to

strictly follow the national curriculum for fear of imprisonment despite students' questions and comments regarding sensitive topics they learned about at home. As Russell shows, teaching about the genocide for reconciliation remains difficult because of the one-sided narrative which hinders critical thinking as well as the lack of training provided to teachers on how to approach the teaching of contentious issues.

Within the chapters in this book, Russell provides a compelling illustration of how teachers and students, through their engagement with the discourses about human rights, citizenship, and reconciliation presented by the Rwandan state, interpret them differently in their local contexts, leading to a distortion of the government's intended aims and undercutting efforts at creating peace. Russell's book concludes with discussion of the prospects and constraints of using education for peace and reconciliation in Rwanda and other post-conflict societies. Her research not only builds upon that of other scholars who have conducted empirical studies on post-conflict history education in Rwanda (e.g., Bentrovato, 2016; King, 2014) by providing a deeper understanding of how Rwandan teachers and students disrupt national educational goals for peace but enhances our knowledge of how peacebuilding and nation-building efforts are limited at the national level. More importantly, although Russell's work is situated within a particular region and time period, it extends the theoretical debate on global-local dynamics, demonstrating the ways in which global models shape the discourses found in national educational policy documents and curricula and how teachers and students take up these models at the local level. *Becoming Rwandan: Education, reconciliation, and the making of a post-genocide citizen* will be of interest to scholars in the areas of peace education, post-conflict history education, citizenship and civic education, human rights education, education in emergencies, sociology, and African studies, as well as agencies and curriculum developers involved in designing educational programs and curriculum to foster peace and reconciliation.

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